

The
BOY WOODCRAFTER

Clarence Hawkes



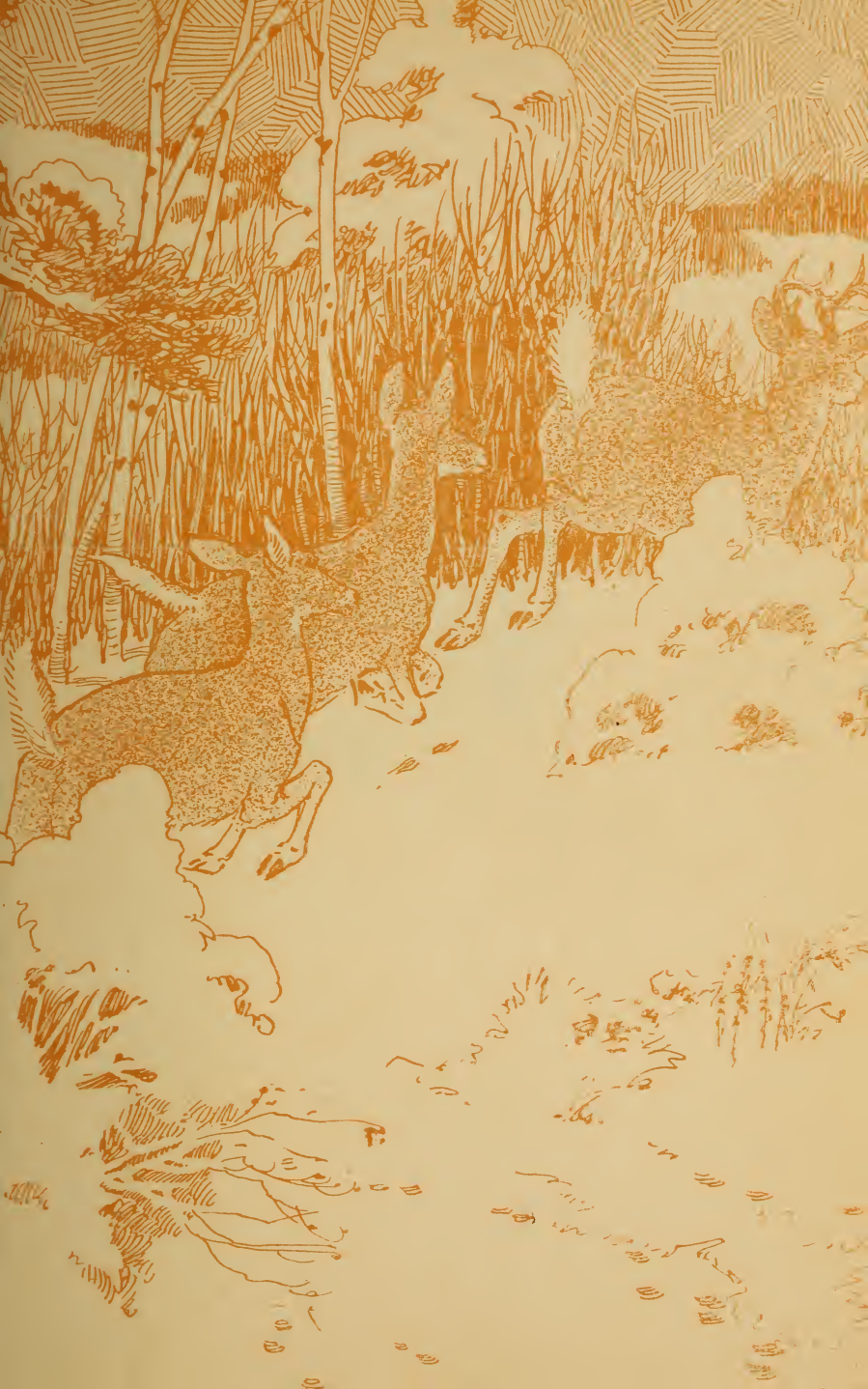
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THE BOY WOODCRAFTER



By CLARENCE HAWKES

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THE BOY WOODCRAFTER

BY

CLARENCE HAWKES

AUTHOR OF "SHAGGYCOAT," "BLACK BRUIN," "THE
TRAIL TO THE WOODS," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY

CHARLES COPELAND



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DEDICATED
TO THE BOY SCOUTS
OF AMERICA

With cordial coöperation in their out-of-doors enterprise, and a hearty handshake, and a warm heart-beat of goodwill for each young Scout himself

Then the little Hiawatha
Learned of every bird its language,
Learned their names and all their secrets,
How they built their nests in Summer,
Where they hid themselves in Winter,
Talked with them whene'er he met them,
Called them "Hiawatha's Chickens."
Of all the beasts he learned the language,
Learned their names and all their secrets,
Talked with them whene'er he met them,
Called them "Hiawatha's Brothers."

—*Longfellow.*

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A NATURALIST

THE BOY WOODCRAFTER

INTRODUCTORY

Why Every Boy Should Be a Naturalist

EVERY boy should be a naturalist because the out of doors world is his kingdom and he takes to it as gracefully as the newly hatched, downy, little duck does to water. A boy is naturally a primitive little man, and that means that he is more or less of a little savage. He harks back more naturally to the days when man lived in a tent or a wigwam, or even in a cave, than does his father, because the man is old and spoiled by training and education, while the boy is fresh and unspoiled by the ways of the world.

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Every normal boy is more or less of a Hiawatha, although I am inclined to think that even Hiawatha was a model Indian youth.

The boy's first instinct is to subdue the wild creatures of the fields and forest. But fortunately for him, and also for the birds, squirrels and bunnies, the new school of nature writers has taught him that there is a better way than killing or subduing his furred and feathered friends.

More and more will he be taught as time goes on, that there are priceless secrets in the head of each bird and squirrel that cannot be gotten from them with a gun or a slingshot, for it is only by gaining the confidence of our forest friends that we can find out these secrets.

One such secret that you can impart to your friends and to the boy's world is worth many well filled game bags.

I am inclined to think that this longing

for the out of doors is the very first impulse that a boy has. That is why when he is still in skirts he runs away, seeking with unsteady feet the world of nature outside. Picking flowers, is usually supposed to belong to the domain of girls, but before a boy gets really into pants, while he is still in skirts, he may be excused if he does girlish things. So you will frequently find him with both chubby fists tightly clutched about the heads of a bouquet of dandelions and buttercups.

He holds them so tightly that he has shut off their breath, and their heads droop sadly in his chubby fist. You can mark his way all down through the mowing to the pasture by the buttercups and daisies scattered along the way. In his eagerness to pluck them he only gets an inch or two of stem, so they are constantly falling from his clutch.

Now you boys may think that is a very childish, girlish amusement, but it shows

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the drift of the boy's mind. He begins subduing all nature by subduing the flowers of the fields. From the wild flowers it is but a step to the wintergreen patch in the pasture, and then but another round up the ladder of nature to the nut gathering expeditions of the Autumn time, and I think that even you will admit that these expeditions to the forest in the golden Autumn are a real boy's sports.

Whenever any one mentions going for chestnuts, butternuts or shag-barks, I always fall to laughing away inside me where no one can hear. Such conversations remind me of two boys who once went for beechnuts. They found them in abundance and filled their baskets. When all the receptacles had been filled there were still plenty of nuts in sight, and daylight for two hours more picking, but nothing to put the nuts in. Finally the older boy persuaded the younger to take

off his undershirt and tie up the armholes and the neck and that was filled with beechnuts.

When they arrived home the boys slipped up to the garret without being seen, and emptied the shirt and the small boy again put it on.

That night they had company but not even the excitement of being admitted to the parlor, where the family received in state, could dispel from the mind of the urchin the terrible fact that something was the matter with his undershirt. Ten thousand needles seemed to be sticking into him, and every time that he moved or tried to scratch himself the number was increased to twenty thousand. When the company had gone, the boy rushed frantically to his bedroom and tore off his undershirt and found that it was bristling with the pricklers from the burrs of the beechnuts.

Did I ever tell you of the small boy, a

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close relation of the youngster who filled his shirt with beechnuts, who thought he could kick the pan of a woodchuck trap, when it was set and still get his bare toe out of the way before the jaws of the trap came together? It is a sorrowful tale and I hate to tell you very much about it. The trap certainly was very spry, and the boy must have tried the experiment with his slow foot, for he was just a second too late.

It is mighty funny what a difference a second's time will make on such an occasion. Anyhow the boy learned a great lesson about being on time, and what a fine thing punctuality is, especially when you are kicking off woodchuck traps with your bare toe.

Why is it that the first time a small boy runs away, he always runs to the brook if there is a brook within running distance?

I think it is because the brook is calling to him, and that he hears its low sweet

voice from afar. Certainly the little stream is destined to play an important part in his after life.

Three great lessons of life the boy can learn from the little brook. The first of these is purity. No matter how much you defile the little stream to-day, to-morrow it is just as pure and sweet as ever, reflecting the blue sky above and the willows upon its banks like the wonderful mirror it is.

The second lesson is that of industry. The brook is never idle, but always pushes on to its fulfillment. Over dams and down flumes it rushes, doing its appointed work.

The third lesson is that of helpfulness. No matter where the little stream wanders, the country through which it passes is always richer for its coming.

To the wide-awake boy the life in the stream and upon its banks is a wonderful book and he never tires of reading it.

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It is divided into four chapters, Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter, and the story for each is quite different.

In the Spring, he can tell you where the pussy-willows first shake out their catkins, and where the sweet flag grows; just where the noisy old kingfisher digs a hole in the bank for his nest, and which stub tree along the bank is his favorite fishing perch. He knows where the mink brings forth her family and how they frolic, darting in and out among the stones; just when the suckers begin to run and when the spearing is best; the favorite holes for trout, and the best pools for swimming.

All these things and many more the boy reads in the Spring chapter of that story about the brook.

You boys all remember the old mill. The one that has now fallen into disuse. It was a famous spot to spend a Summer afternoon in my boyhood. The water

came tumbling over the dam with a pleasant sound, and the pond above was as transparent as the sky.

Upon the pond was a contrivance that we boys used to call a boat. It was watersoaked and heavy and it leaked like a sieve, but that made no difference. The best canoe in the world, with all its paint and nickel, could not have given us half the pleasure the old tub did. If it was leaky that gave just the proper thrill about going out in her. One boy for the bailing can, and two to row. That constituted a crew for the *Pride of the Wave*, as we called her. Of course she could be run short-handed, but one man had to always keep the bailing going, no matter what happened.

The Autumn and Winter chapters of the brook's story were not as long and interesting as the other two. It was fun though, to explore the stream for muskrat houses, and see how industriously the rats

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had builded against the coming of Winter.

In Winter, skating and fishing through the ice were the essential things in this water story, so you see there was no time of year that the stream and the ponds which it fed were not calling to the boy.

Learning to swim and to paddle a canoe or row a boat are an essential part of every boy's education. More and more as time goes on will boys be taught these useful accomplishments. For this reason alone, the boys' camps, that are becoming so numerous all over the country, are performing a splendid service.

When you can so combine a boy's work with his play that he cannot tell where one begins and the other leaves off, work becomes play and is no longer irksome. Berry picking in the country is such work. There is so much to learn while one is berry picking that the labor

is tempered with pleasure and never ending surprises.

A score of birds are flying to and fro in the blue-berry lot, and the boy must know all their names. If there is a bird whose name he does not know he will not rest until he has found it out.

It is just along the edge of the woods where the blackberries grow that the partridge brings forth her brood to get their share of the luscious fruit. The gray rabbits also hop out and in among the blackberry patches. Out on the cranberry bog are some of the largest muskrat houses that were ever built by a rat family.

Beechnutting, chestnutting and walnutting are all work that is play. Days that are full of surprises and wonderful secrets to be learned from the book of nature.

In the Winter, the book of life in field and woods is even more interesting than

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in the Summer, although there is not so much going on.

Then each little four-footed denizen of the forest leaves his name and his address written in the new snow. Not only this, but he often tells you his business, and upon what errand he is intent.

In the Winter a desperate game is being played by all these forest kin. It is the game of catching the other fellow and not being caught yourself.

Often a feather and a drop of blood in the snow tells its pitiful tale. All of these things are as interesting to the wide-awake boy as the most exciting book, once he learns to read the signs in the snow. But you may say, these things apply only to the country boy. They are not for the city youth.

Perhaps they apply with more force to the country boy, but there is still a deal of nature in the average city, if you will only look for it. There are more

night hawks in the city than in the country. Even in large cities like Boston and New York they rear their young high up on the roofs of the skyscrapers, and you may see them circling above the thickly thronged streets, uttering their hoarse cries. In every water spout, and nearly every cranny the English sparrow has built her nest, and they swarm upon trees, telephone and telegraph wires. Squirrels abound in city parks, and they are tamer and not so hard to observe as the squirrels in the country.

Robins build their nests in the shade trees along the city street, and scold at the passer-by. Of all our American birds, Mr. Burroughs considers the robin the most social, and companionable.

A friend of mine reported hearing the hermit thrush pouring out his tender evening love song, in the very heart of Boston.

Another friend had a peculiar experi-

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ence in the celebrated historical burying ground, King's Chapel, in the congested portion of Boston. He chanced to wander in there one Winter's twilight, and looking up into the boughs of the fir trees discovered that they were literally alive with sparrows. Hundreds and thousands of these little birds had come to the cemetery to roost in the trees during the cold winter night. Each tiny ball of feathers had its head tucked under its wing, and there they sat, like rows of feathery balls.

The naturalist struck his hands together and all the hundreds of heads came out from under the many wings like a flash, and bright eyes winked down at him, but in another moment all had disappeared under the wings again.

It is a matter of congratulation to the youth of America that boys are at last coming into their own. Their aims and ambitions are now being understood.

Each year thousands, and tens of thousands, of boys go forth to nature to spend happy and helpful weeks in the boys' camp. Here they are brought close to nature, and some of that primæval happiness and knowledge, that civilization has robbed them of, is returned to them.

Here the city boy, less fortunate than his country cousin in many ways, may learn to row and swim, to fish and tramp the woods just as eagerly as his forebears did, when the country was young and all lived near to nature.

Here he is taught to paddle a canoe and pitch a tent, and to take care of himself under conditions quite different from those of his normal daily life.

Ernest Thompson Seton's "Little Savages," and Colonel Baden Powell's "Boy Scouts" are natural boys. Both of these movements are in the right direction.

It is a fine thing for a boy to be taught that primitive knowledge of the red man,

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which we are so rapidly forgetting. To know how to travel by the stars when no compass is at hand, or, if the night is cloudy, by the lean of the timber or by the moss upon the trees, may some day save the grown man's life. To build a fire in the forest when the boughs are dripping rain, or even when there is snow on the ground, may some time prove equally helpful. To build a camp fire without having any smoke, and then to be able to cook a good meal by it, are accomplishments that no boy need scorn.

These are accomplishments our ancestors knew. Arts that every man is glad to possess when his country's call comes, for they are very essential to the life of a soldier.

If boys would be strong of limb, quick to see and understand, self-reliant and happy, live in the open. Live near to nature and know all her secrets. That alone will give you a clear brain, a keen

eye, and a heart like the oak, which the wind and the cold have toughened.

This will be no hardship for you, for as I have already observed the out-of-doors is a Boy's Kingdom. The open fields and the sweet, green woods are his world and once he has tasted their joys he will never be satisfied for the whole year with the restrictions of city life. For a few weeks at least each year he will break away from pavements and go back to the mold of the forest.

How well all the truly great men have understood these things. Tolstoi says that all of our strength comes up from Mother Earth through the soles of the feet. A gift from the heart of nature to the soul of man. It is for you boys to learn these things while you are still young in order that in your old age you may not know too late of the world of happiness you have missed. The child is father of the man, and the boy is richer in

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his happiness than he will ever be again.
The poet Hood understood this when he
sang:

“I remember, I remember the fir tree dark and high,
I used to think its slender top would reach unto
the sky.

It was but childish ignorance, but now 'tis little
joy

To know I'm further off from heaven than when I
was a boy.”

ONES OWN BACK DOOR-YARD

CHAPTER I

One's Own Back Door-yard

IT was about ten o'clock of as dismal a Saturday morning as ever spoiled a boy's fun by raining.

Old Ben and I had planned a fishing trip that would have been memorable among all the good times we had enjoyed together, but it had rained so hard that my mother had vetoed our going.

The lunch basket was packed, the bait dug, and everything was in readiness except the weather.

But how it did rain! Great gusts of wind drove the rain before it in blinding sheets, and small rivulets ran in the road, and in the walk.

If it had only been just a drizzle we

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would not have minded. The fishing would have been all the better, but this deluge put all thoughts of our long planned trip out of mind.

I sat on the back porch bewailing my hard luck and watching the downpour. There was some satisfaction in that, even if the storm had spoiled my fun.

It was a regular duck's day, and no mistake. No creature that was not oiled from head to foot could stand such a drenching as this.

If I had been a girl, I might have had the consolation of crying, but as I was a boy and expected to celebrate my eleventh birthday soon, even that comfort was denied me.

Presently a tall, dark figure loomed up through the mist, coming down the pathway leading across the mowing at the back of the house. At first I thought I was mistaken, for sometimes I could see it, and then a violent gust of wind and

rain would blot it out, but soon it drew nearer, and I made out old Ben, coming at his accustomed long stride. In another minute he was hurrying up the steps of the back porch the rain fairly streaming down his long rubber coat.

He was laughing and chuckling and looked the very picture of merriment.

"Isn't it an awful shame, Ben," I began. "This nasty old rain has spoiled all our fun, and now we can't take the trip to the pond."

"Fiddlesticks, boy. Yes, we can. Why, I expect to go next Saturday. You needn't go along unless you want to, but I propose to go."

"I almost know it will rain and be another horrid day just like this one," I said. "Isn't it an awful shame that it rains to-day, Ben?"

"Well, no, Harry, I can't positively say that it is, if you want me to tell the 'honest-Injun-truth.' You see there are

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a great many people in the world and it is awful hard for God to suit them all at the same time. The poor farmers, who raise all the good things for us to eat, have been wishing for rain for weeks. Everything was gettin' shriveled up; crops were all spilin'. If this state of affairs had kept up much longer why we wouldn't had any crops at all. All the trees and flowers looked pathetic and droopin', just æs though they had lost their best friend, and really they had.

"So you see there are lots of people and things to consider. Maybe, this morning, when the sun came up, God saw how shriveled things were, and how discouraged the farmers all looked, and He said to Himself 'I guess I had better have a rain to-day; a good hard one, and see if it won't freshen things up a bit.' Then maybe He said, 'There are old Ben and Harry, they want to go to the pond

fishing to-day. Now, if it rains, they can't go. What shall I do?"

"Don't you see, Harry, that there were hundreds and hundreds of farmers who wanted it to rain and only you and I who didn't, so God would have to suit the greater number."

Ben's queer picture of God trying to suit all the people at once made me smile, even though I was greatly disappointed. He always had such a bright way of looking at things. No matter how bad a thing was, old Ben could always find some good way of explaining it, and of getting sunshine out of it.

"Well, you are a funny fellow to always make things look good when they are really bad," I said. "How do you think all these queer thoughts?"

"Well, boy," said the old man, patting me affectionately on the head, "it is this way. I have lived a long time compared

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with you, and a man can't spend seventy years in this beautiful old world without doing a pile of thinking.

"It seems to me the more I consider how wonderfully the world is made, how all the plants and animals are fed, and protected, and how even the smallest things are made as carefully as though they had been mountains, when I get to thinking about these things it makes me feel that there is a wise and wonderful power behind all. So I know that all rainy days must be good and the very best thing in their place. Now, I will take off my coat and we will set right down here on the old back porch and have the finest kind of a time seeing things."

"Seeing things!" I gasped in astonishment. Then the funny side of the proposition came over me and I laughed till I cried.

"I know you are a great fellow to see

things, Ben," I said at last, "but this is the greatest joke you ever made."

"It is no joke at all, Harry," replied my friend seriously, "I mean every word of it. We will have a fine time seeing things. I never yet got tucked into any corner in the world where I could not see something mighty interesting.

"Nearest I ever came to seeing absolutely nothing was down in New York. I got cooped up there a day once, and I'll admit that I was almost stumped. New York comes the nearest to being a howling wilderness of any place I was ever in. But put me out in the country and I can always see something.

"Now, Harry," he continued, seating himself in an old wooden-bottomed chair, and tilting it back against the wall for comfort, "our field of observation is the back porch and just a few feet outside. Now, what do you make of it?"

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"A wet slippery floor, some morning-glory vines, and, that's all, just a horrid place," I answered, "but it isn't quite as bad as it was before you came, Ben."

"Guess your woodsman's specks are rather dim this morning," replied Ben with a merry twinkle in his eye. "Perhaps it has rained on them. Guess you will have to rub them up, boy. Try again; I can see lots of interesting things besides those you have mentioned. All you have seen is just the frame to the picture. What a sorry world this would be if people looked only at the frames, and let all its beautiful pictures go unnoticed!"

I looked carefully up and down the floor boards, peering into all the cracks, while old Ben tried to look away and keep from laughing.

Finally I gave it up, and returned to my first assertion that it was a dull,

stupid place with nothing interesting in it.

Ben laughed. "Well, Harry, suppose I just set the ball to rolling. I can see a little creature that can make a morsel for you that will fairly make your mouth water. One of the most wonderful little things that God ever made. It and its kind know all the secrets of the flowers, and the blossoms yield up their very sweetest nectar for them. Many of the flowers and trees could not bear fruit at all if it was not for them. They live in a kingdom and have a wonderful queen who lays over half a million eggs in her short life of a few years. Look at the honey bee, Harry, just crawling out of that morning glory trumpet. Now, there is a study for you; something that you might read about a whole lifetime and then not find out all there is to learn."

I looked at the particular trumpet in-

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licated and saw a very ordinary honey-bee, with three golden bands running across her abdomen. She was just coming out of the trumpet and was shaking the wet from her wings.

“Probably got caught in there when the rain came up and so thought she would wait inside until it was over,” said Ben. “A very wise decision. When it lets up a little, I presume she will go home.”

“Where is her home?” I asked, for I had already become interested in this three-banded rogue who made so free with the flowers.

“Perhaps it is a little white house, that stands in a row of little white houses, on bee street,” replied my friend, “or maybe it is a bee tree two or three miles from here. But, in either case, she will not waste any time in getting home once she has started.

“When she fairly gets her bearings she

One's Own Back Door-Yard 45

will fly home as straight as an old crow will make for the rookery, and that has come to be a proverb."

"How can she tell which way to go if she cannot see her home?" I asked. "She has no road to travel."

"No, she does not do it that way," replied Ben. "Many of the animals and birds, and even the small insects that some people despise, have a sense of direction, a kind of compass in their heads that will always tell them which is the way home. No matter how dark it is or how rough the way, this instinct never fails.

"If a man is lost in the woods or on the prairies, his horse knows the way home a great deal better than he does, and if he is a wise man he will give his faithful steed the rein and let him take his master home.

"A dog never gets lost in the woods, and a cat can always find her way back to the old home when she has been moved.

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We humans don't know it all, Harry, and in some ways we are inferior in wisdom to God's lesser creatures."

"What has the bee been doing in the morning-glory blossom?" I asked.

"She's been after honey," replied the old man. "The flowers all know her and love her too, I reckon, although she takes their very heart's secret from them.

"This is the way she does it. She crawls away down into the trumpet until she gets where the honey is, then she licks it out with her little tongue, and puts it away in her honey stomach. That is a small stomach just in front of her real stomach. The sweet will stay in there until it is partly digested, and then it will be ready to put in the comb, that perhaps she made yesterday to hold the honey. So all the honey that we get is partly digested, and that is why sick people can eat it."

"How many are there in the little white house?" I asked.

"That depends," replied Ben. "Perhaps there are fifty or seventy-five thousand, if it is a very large swarm, or maybe there are only ten or fifteen thousand. But there are as many bees in a hive as there are people in a good-sized city, so you see it is quite a family."

"What do they all do?" I asked.

"Different things," replied Ben. "The queen lays eggs and her duty is to keep laying eggs so that the hive shall keep up its numbers. You see, Harry, an ordinary bee lives only sixty or ninety days, so the queen must be diligent to keep their numbers good. In the autumn there are no bees left in the hive that were there in the spring, except the queen. They are all dead and new ones have taken their places.

"So the queen lays eggs. The workers

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who are her daughters gather honey, and make comb in which to store it.

“The drones are the queen’s sons, and they do nothing but live on the honey that the daughters gather. After the queen has made love to one of them and they have been married, the drones are all killed, then the hive contains only the queen and her daughters. And it is a busy place.”

“But what becomes of the queen’s husband?” I asked.

“He dies the same morning that he is married,” replied Ben. “His wedding day is also his funeral day. His honeymoon is short and sweet.

“But all the honey-bees do not live in the little white house. Many of them live in bee-trees in the deep woods, where they store up hundreds of pounds of honey. It is great fun to hunt for a bee-tree.”

“Let’s go some day, Ben,” I cried, all excitement.

One's Own Back Door-Yard 49

"All right, boy, I intended to take you some time; but I guess we will not go to-day.

"Now that was pretty good for one morning-glory trumpet, Harry. Let's see what else there is here on the old back porch."

"This rotten plank is full of ants," I said, rather indifferently.

"Good, boy, good," cried Ben slapping me on the shoulder. "Now you are getting your woodsman's specks rubbed up a bit. Perhaps I shall make a woodsman of you after all.

"Well, ants are just about as wonderful as bees, only I don't love 'em as I do the bees, because they are not as useful, but they are mighty smart just the same.

"Did you ever imagine when you see a large ant-hill in the pasture that in that mound is a great republic like the United States?"

"No," I gasped in astonishment, "tell me about it."

"Well, long before God made man, He made bees and ants. Long before He set Adam and Eve in the garden and told them to be good, ants and bees were running kingdoms and republics.

"The ants not only have a government with a president, but they also have a standing army, like the Emperor of Germany, and they fight battles with other ant-hills—have spies and scouts and real battles. They build roads and bridges, and move heavy obstacles that are in their way. They do things that, considering their size, would make the building of Brooklyn bridge by men seem like child's play.

"They are mighty funny little creatures. They can bite too. If you don't believe it just step on an ant-hill some time and let about a thousand of them run up your leg.

One's Own Back Door-Yard 51

"Don't see anything else about the old porch, do you, Harry?" continued Ben.

I peeked into all the cracks and cran-nies, but could see nothing.

"I can see a mighty interesting old chap in the dirt just underneath the piazza," said Ben pointing almost under my bare feet. "If he had been a bear he might have bitten you."

I strained my eyes almost to the bursting point but could see nothing.

"It is just one of nature's little tricks, boy," said Ben. "He is what is called protectively colored. That is, his clothes just match his surroundings."

He was lying partly buried in the dirt, and even when Ben pointed him out to me, I could not see him until we poked him with a stick, and made him disclose himself.

"He is a great hider, is Bufo, the hop-toad," continued Ben, "and a most useful little creature. I do not know

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whether he really has a precious jewel in his head or not, but he is a precious jewel himself to the farmer, for he catches many injurious worms and bugs and helps to save the farmer's crops from destruction. We could not get along without him, for all he is an ugly looking fellow.

"His tongue is fastened at the other end from what yours is, Harry, so all he has to do when he sees a fly is to flick it out, and as his tongue is sticky, like fly paper, Mr. Fly is caught before he knows it.

"Bufo is quite a musician too. In the spring when the bullfrogs and the hylas are singing, you will hear him down by the pool. He puffs out his throat until you would think it must burst, and then sends forth a shrill tremulous note, that can be heard for a long distance.

"A family of toads under the front door-step is as good as a circus any evening."

One's Own Back Door-Yard 53

"Where in the world did you learn all these things, Ben?" I asked in astonishment, for it seemed to me that Ben could make a story of almost anything that crawled, crept, ran, or flew.

"Well, Harry," he replied, "most of it I picked up. I have always kept my eyes open, which is a very necessary thing to do if one wants to see all that is going on in God's busy world. I see things and then I think about them, that is necessary too. If a man or a boy will do this he can have a first-rate time even in his own back door-yard."

A WARY MOTHER

CHAPTER II

A Wary Mother

IT was fence-mending time in the country, and Ben and I were on our way to the pasture land to look after a half-mile of brush fence that ran through the deep pine and hemlock woods.

It was always a red letter day for me when old Ben came to the farm to work for my father.

Fence mending time in New England is about the first of May, or perhaps a little earlier, if the farmer is forehanded; so, you see it was just the time of year to see things in the deep woods, if one had the eyes to see them.

All the world seemed joyous this glorious May morning, and it made me glad just to hear the pleasant sounds about me.

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The young stock were lowing, and the little lambs were frisking and bleating. The pigeons were cooing, and the rooster was crowing as though he would split his throat, but his real object was to crow so loud that his rival could hear him a quarter of a mile away.

The birds were all busy flying to and fro with the most important air, as it was nest building time.

Really there was some excuse for their seeming importance. Most of the human family build a new house once in a lifetime, but many of the birds build a new one each spring.

Just as old Ben and I got over the stone wall in the pasture, we heard a cock partridge drumming, which is always an interesting sound in the spring, for then it means something.

"I know that old fellow," said Ben. "His drumming log isn't very far from the fence; perhaps we will get a glimpse

of him. He is a very old cock and I have seen him drumming several times. I know he is old because the feathers on his legs grow down very low. In fact, he almost looks as though he had on pantallets and you never see any but an old bird with feathers like that."

When we got within about ten rods of the drumming log we crept forward carefully, Ben leading the way and only going forward while the cock was drumming and keeping perfectly still when he stopped.

This is the only way in which one can get very close to a drumming cock, as they seem to stop and listen between acts, to see that all is well.

Finally, we got up very close to the log, within fifty feet perhaps, when Ben suddenly motioned to me to come forward. We always spoke in signs in the woods, just as the Indians do; this does not disturb the creature watched.

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I crept forward as lightly as a cat and peered down between two tree trunks in the direction that Ben indicated with his finger.

The log was in a rather open spot and to my great surprise I saw two cock partridges standing upon it, one at either end, with their heads down and facing each other in the most belligerent attitude.

Their feathers were all bristled up and they looked about twice their ordinary size.

Presently the old cock, with the feathers low down on his legs, sprang at his antagonist and buffeted him off the log. The quarrel was evidently over the log; or, rather, the female partridge whose admiration and love was won by the cock who drummed here, so there was really a good deal at stake.

The younger cock did not take the buffet that sent him to the ground kindly, for he at once sprang back and dealt the

old cock such a blow with beak and wings, that the real owner of the log was dislodged from his perch.

This was the signal for a battle royal. Such a battle as makes the fighting of the ordinary barnyard fowl seem tame enough. The partridge is much quicker and stronger for its size than any domestic fowl. Where the slower domestic fowl would strike once these lightning-like birds struck twice and the buffet of their wings sounded like the whipping of a carpet.

Up and down they went, sometimes fighting on the log and sometimes on the ground. Sometimes meeting on the ground and sometimes in mid-air, as towards the latter part of the battle each tried to pull feathers from his rival's breast.

Flash, flash, slap, slap, went their wings.

All through the fight the older cock

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seemed to have the better of it. Once he bowled his rival over and we thought he was vanquished, but the youngster was game and he soon went back to the fight.

The female partridge, sitting somewhere near the log, was evidently to his liking. Perhaps the old cock had gotten his sweetheart away from him, certainly he battled bravely.

At last his powerful rival dealt him a terrible blow that left him motionless under the bushes and the old cock ran to him and began pecking at his head.

“Here, stop, you’ll kill him,” shouted Ben, starting to the assistance of the vanquished cock.

At the sound of his voice the victorious cock rose in air with a roar of wings and went sailing down the aisles of the May woods with the speed of an express train.

We went to where the apparently lifeless partridge lay, and Ben picked him

up. He did not even flutter and to my untutored mind he was stone dead.

"Guess he won't fight any more, Ben," I said, feeling bad for the poor bird.

"His heart still flutters," replied Ben. "We'll take him down to the brook and sprinkle a little water on him, and I guess he will be as good as new, but it will rather astonish him when he comes to, to see what company he is keeping."

So we took the apparently lifeless bird to the spring and Ben sprinkled his head with water and then laid him on the grass to see what would happen.

After a few minutes he fluttered feebly and then stood up. His eyes looked dazed and he did not seem really to know just where he was; then a furtive look came into them and he squatted low on the ground and watched us intently.

Suddenly there was a roar of wings just over my head that made me duck and clutch the top of my head with both

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hands. I looked on the ground and my cock partridge was gone.

"Where is he, Ben?" I asked.

"There," replied Ben with a grin, "and pretty lively for a dead bird, too."

I looked where Ben indicated, and saw the cock sailing away, already nearly out of sight in the distant cover.

"I guess he has had all he will want of old feather-legs," said Ben, with a chuckle. "He ought to have known better. Did you notice his markings, Harry? He was a beautiful bird, with copper-colored markings and a reddish ruff. We don't see partridges marked like him often in these parts."

"There'll be a nest somewhere near that drumming log. We'll keep our eyes open and see if we can find it. The partridge's drumming is a part of his courtship and early married life. One can usually find the nest within five or ten rods of the log. The partridge drums for his mate, just

as the woodpecker does, but the female partridge does not answer as does the female woodpecker. Mrs. Partridge is more modest than that. Now I guess we had better attend to our fence mending."

The following day we searched for the nest, but at first were unsuccessful in finding it.

"You see," said Ben, when we had about given up the search, "the female partridge will lie very close when she is on the nest, and you have nearly to run over her before she flies; she hates to disclose the precious spot.

"Sometimes it is in a brush heap, and sometimes under the edge of an old log, but it is always hidden wonderfully well. Mrs. Partridge does not want the red squirrel to find it and eat her eggs. It would be still worse to have the weasel find the nest. Now the top of that old fallen spruce would be a likely place; try it, Harry."

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I went to the spruce top and peered in but could see nothing; then I struck with my axe helve, and the female partridge ran quickly from the underbrush, and flew away into the deep woods.

"There, what did I tell you?" exclaimed Ben exultantly. "Now let's see what we can find."

We poked away the thick branches and found the nest, with eight eggs in it.

"She hasn't got done laying yet," said Ben. "She will have anywhere from ten to fifteen eggs when she has finished."

"Ben," I said, all excitement, "I have got a plan; let's wait until she has set upon the eggs for a while and when they are almost ready to hatch let's put my bantam on the eggs and let her finish hatching them, and see if the partridge chicks won't claim her for their mother and we will have a brood of young partridges to raise."

"How shall we keep Mrs. Partridge

from pounding the life out of Seebright when we are gone?" asked Ben. "It won't do to move the eggs."

"We can stake down some wire netting over the nest and make it tight enough so not even a weasel could get in."

"Quite a plan, Harry, quite a plan," replied Ben. "I believe I will try it. I'd be curious to see how it would work myself."

About three weeks later one evening at dusk old Ben and I might have been seen hurrying to the woods. I had Seebright under my coat and she was clucking and scolding away vigorously. Ben was carrying a large roll of fine wire netting and some stakes that he had made for the purpose.

"It's a mean trick," he said as we climbed over the wall, "but I am mighty curious to see how it will come out."

Mrs. Partridge was very loath to leave her nest, for she knew as well as we did

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that it was nearly time for her eggs to hatch. So she quitted and fluttered about for a time, trying every stratagem known to mother partridges to get us to chase her away from the vicinity of her precious nest. Finally she flew away and we showed Seebright the nest with twelve warm eggs in it.

The little bantam seemed delighted with our discovery, and she settled down upon the eggs just as though it had been her own nest and not that of her wild kindred.

Ben and I then staked the netting down carefully about her, making a fine netting coup; not even a weasel could have gotten her when we had finished.

We then put in some corn and a dish of water and left her to finish hatching the young partridges.

The following afternoon we went to the woods to see how Seebright was getting along. We had barely entered the forest

and were still quite a distance from the nest when we heard the quick clucking and cries of "quit, quit," that the mother partridge always uses when she is trying to hide her young.

"Quick, Harry, quick," cried Ben, and we hurried forward. We were just in time to see a bevy of tiny partridges scurrying in every direction, while the mother was fluttering about upon the ground in great agony. I sprang forward to catch her, but she slipped from my grasp. Then I remembered something that had happened once before when Ben and I discovered a brood of partridge chicks, and did not try further to catch her. Presently she flew away and I turned to see what Ben was doing.

He was sitting on a log laughing and I could see that he was immensely pleased about something.

I did not think that he was laughing at my trying to catch the lame mother par-

tridge, for I had only been fooled for a minute.

"Well, well, Harry, that old partridge has completely whipped us at our own game. Never heard of anything quite so slick in my whole life."

"I know she has hidden all her chicks and gotten away herself," I answered, "but what of that; let's go and see how Seebright and the eggs are coming on."

"Seebright and the eggs!" exclaimed Ben chuckling. "She hasn't any eggs. These are her eggs hiding here in the brake."

I opened my mouth wide with astonishment.

"Why, Ben, you don't mean that the eggs have hatched and our partridge chicks are gone, do you?"

"Just so," replied my companion. "I know it just as well as though I had looked under Seebright. Mrs. Partridge has beaten us at our own game. When

she found that another was sitting on her eggs she was probably mighty put out, but finding she could do nothing, she just hung about to see how it would all end. Maybe she had a plan in her wise head. I can't just say as to that. You see the eggs were probably further along than we imagined and they hatched last night. When they were all hatched, Mrs. Partridge coolly called the chicks away from Seebright through the meshes of the wire-netting and walked off with the whole brood, without as much as saying 'Thank you for your trouble, Seebright.' "

It was all just as Ben had supposed. We found the nest empty, and Seebright bristling and clucking under the netting, as mad as the proverbial wet hen.

I took her out and put her under my coat, but she would not be comforted. She considered that we had played a mean trick on her and she pecked savagely at me.

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Ben rolled up the netting and we trudged homeward, my companion philosophizing as we went. He was greatly pleased at the turn of affairs, but I was terribly disappointed, for I had planned an elaborate partridge farm from which I would reap great riches.

"I tell you what, Harry, there isn't much use trying to get ahead of nature and her wild creatures. If you do get one of them in a trap or pitfall, they are so helpless and scornful of you that it takes all the fun out of the victory.

"But usually they get the best of us just as Mrs. Partridge did. The partridge is a fine, self-reliant bird. The chicks will run and almost fly before their feathers fairly get dry. In twenty-four hours they are hunting for their own living. What their mother don't know about bringing up chicks isn't worth knowing. She gives them their dust bath and their rotten wood bath, and keeps

them free from nits and lice. She knows what is good for the grub in the head and for all the ailments that chicks are heir to. She varies their diet with berries, bugs, insects, grasshoppers, crickets and lots of other dainties, and when they need physic she knows where the berries that they want grow.

“She covers them with her wings when they are chicks and when they are partly grown she teaches them her store of partridge wisdom, that they may take care of themselves when the brood breaks up. They learn partly from precept and partly from imitation, just as all the young things in the wilderness do.

“Night after night they huddle close together, each greeting the last comer as they gather, with soft loving clucks and cheets. The vigilant mother shields them from the hawk, the owl, the fox, the weasel and the snare.

“Perhaps it is the hunter that finally

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breaks up this happy family, or perhaps it is the autumn madness that always attacks the young birds in November. Finally they all go their several ways and each fights the battle of existence for himself.

“Here we are, Harry, at your gate. Hope those partridge chicks of yours won’t all turn out cocks, because I would like a setting of eggs myself next Spring. Good-night.”

A LIVELY BEE HUNT

CHAPTER III

A Lively Bee Hunt

ONE Saturday afternoon in June about two months after our talk about bees, old Ben came into the yard wearing a most ridiculous-looking thing on his head.

It was about as large as a good-sized water pail, and came down over his head and rested on his shoulders. It was made from a framework of wire, covered with mosquito netting. The whole protected the face entirely, but from what, I did not just know.

"Why, Ben, what kind of a thing do you call that?" I asked. "Looks as though you had a giant's hat on and it was about twice too large for you."

"That's a bee-veil," replied Ben, "and

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I have brought along one for you; I made it this morning. Let's see how it fits."

So I took off my hat and slipped the queerly-shaped thing over my head, until it rested on my shoulders just as Ben's did. It was a most interesting headgear, and I was delighted with it.

"What is it for, Ben," I asked; "to keep out diseases?" I had read so much about microbes that this use for the great hat at once suggested itself to me.

Ben laughed. "It keeps off something that will make some people about as sick as microbes, but that never bothered me much. It is to keep off bees. We are going bee-hunting, Harry, and so I have brought along these bee-veils. Although we may not have any use for them, I thought it would be well for us to have them along."

I was all excitement to go, and we soon set off across the fields, Ben leading the

way as usual. Besides the bee-veils Ben carried a small box with a slide cover, which could be opened readily.

Inside the box was some honey, and Ben explained to me that this was to decoy the bees into the box, where they would load up with honey. When released they would at once set off for their tree in a *bee-line*, to store the honey.

I was the first to discover a bee, and pointed it out to Ben with great excitement.

"Pooh, Harry, that's only a drone," said the old man contemptuously. "He wouldn't be any better than a fly. He would just eat up our honey and then fly away without as much as saying 'thank you.' He wouldn't go back to the tree, but would go dawdling about anywhere he happened to like. Drones aren't any use in a bee hunt. You can tell them by the deep booming sound of their wings.

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They fly much more heavily than the workers. They are also slightly larger. Ah, here comes a worker."

Old Ben drew the slide of his small box and stood perfectly still, while the honey-bee hummed about our heads. "She's smelled it; they have got great noses," he explained. "It is by scent that the guards at the door of each hive tell whether a bee belongs to their hive or not and decide whether they will let her in. Imagine you and me having to tell all our relations by the sense of smell!"

After hunting about for a few seconds, the bee entered our box and Ben shut the slide and left her to take her fill.

"She'll be ready to make a bee-line for home in a few minutes," he said. "It is mighty queer how all these little creatures know the way home. The homing pigeon's instinct is wonderful. After they have been trained these birds will fly hundreds and even a thousand miles home,

bringing a message to some beleaguered fort, or from some starving villagers in a dreary, desolate land. The homing pigeons are most useful creatures in time of war. They have been used even since Noah let the dove go from the ark."

I smiled and old Ben continued:

"Harry, think of this. Sometimes they will take one of these little birds hundreds of miles out to sea on a ship, and then toss it up into the air to seek its home.

"All about in every direction, as far as the eye can reach, is nothing but the rolling sea, endless and terrible. If the poor pigeon did not fly in the right direction, it might have to fly and fly, on and on, until it dropped exhausted into the sea.

"But the pigeon has a God-given instinct, that is better than man's compass. Some pigeon breeders say that this instinct is located in the large bunches about the ears, for the best homing pigeons are the breeds with the largest bunches.

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“Well, that pigeon set adrift above old ocean don’t need any landmarks. He just circles about two or three times until something inside him tells him which way to point his bill and then he starts, straight as an arrow he goes, and never once turns to right or left until he drops into the home-cote.”

While Ben had been talking he had released the captive bee, which had flown home.

When she returned she brought three more bees with her, all of whom we made captive.

“I guess we have got bees enough by this time and some of them ought to be pretty well loaded up. I’ll let out one. Now get your eye on it when it leaves the box and when you see what direction it is going just leg it and chase it clean home.”

If there was any twinkle in Ben’s eye when he said these words I did not notice

it. So when the bee, laden with sweets, for which it had not labored, came forth, circled about for a few seconds and then started across the fields in a line straight as a telephone wire, I started after it at my best pace.

“Leg it, leg it, Harry,” shouted my companion, “I am afraid she is going to get away from you.”

I doubled my efforts, but in vain, for the speck in the air above me grew smaller and smaller and just as I lost it I heard Ben shout, “look out,” but his cry came too late.

Without the slightest warning I plunged head first into the meadow ditch.

My bee-veil was jammed down on to my head and crushed out of shape, and I was covered with mud and water.

“Too bad, Harry, too bad,” said Ben, helping me out a minute later. “I guess you’re not hurt much. I shouted for you

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to look out, but you was so hard after that bee that you didn't hear me.

"That is the trouble with chasing bees pell-mell crosslots. You want to be cross-eyed, and have one eye look down, and the other up. If you keep your eyes on the bee, you go into a hole, and if you look down you lose your bee. It's real inconsiderate of bees not to travel the highways when they start for home.

"Now we will follow along in the direction that this bee took for thirty or forty rods, and then we will let out another and that one will continue the trail for us. You see it is a kind of relay race."

When we let out the second bee I let Ben lead off in the chase after it, while I followed carefully behind.

As much as I loved Ben I was rather in hopes that he would fall into a ditch, or trip on a stick so that I could laugh, but he did not.

I do not know how he managed it,

but he always seemed to find the smooth places.

This time we followed the bee much farther than we did the first, but it was finally lost.

"There isn't much use of you and me trying to make sixty miles an hour, Harry," said Ben at the end of a longer chase than usual, after which we both stood panting.

"That is about what a bee makes when she is lining it out for home. Last year they raced some bees with carrier pigeons, and the bees came in ahead. They sprinkled dust on their wings so they could be sure that it was the same bees that won out."

The eight or ten bees that we had captured took us about a mile and near to the deep woods.

The last one that we let out flew back in just the opposite direction from that which the other bees had taken.

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“We have gone past the tree,” said Ben, “and it can’t be a great way off.”

Ben again opened the box containing honey, and we sat down upon a knoll to wait for developments.

In the course of a minute or two a bee came for the sweet which she had evidently smelled.

When she had eaten her fill she did not circle about as the bees had done when we first started out, but made a straight line for the woods.

Ben did not chase her but sat still and waited for another. Soon it came, and another and another, until a dozen had filled themselves at the box.

“Do you see that old broken-topped maple at the edge of the woods?” asked Ben, pointing out the tree in question.

“Well, that is the bee-tree. I have had my eye on it for some time, and they all fly for it as straight as a string.

“Here comes another. Now we will

keep this one and see what she will tell us."

So we made a captive of the bee and then went up close to the maple stub. Finally Ben let the prisoner go, and it flew straight to the maple and disappeared inside through a deep crack in the trunk.

"That settles it," said Ben, "this is our bee-tree.

"Now you gather a lot of twigs and dry sticks and we will see what virtue there is in a little smoke. Long before bees ever had reason to fear man they feared smoke. It was the forest fires of pre-historic times that taught the bee fear of smoke. Smoke seems to paralyze and stupefy the swarm, and a few whiffs are worth a good deal when you are after honey."

So I gathered a large pile of fagots, and we soon had a bright blaze going. Then Ben put on rotten wood and grass to make it smudge, and we soon had a

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great column of smoke pouring into the tree.

At first the bees came out in a black, angry cloud, and I fled to a safe distance, but Ben did not seem to mind them. Finally the smoke drove them all into the tree, and Ben began to cut it down.

The outer shell of the old stub was very hard and it seemed to me that Ben never would get it down. At last, without the slightest warning, it fell with a mighty crash, breaking open at the crack where we had seen the bees enter.

I never would have believed that such small creatures as bees could have made such a roaring with their wings as that swarm made when it poured forth in a black cloud, to avenge itself upon the destroyers of its home.

In an instant the air about us was black with them.

I thrust my hands into my pockets to protect them and ran pell-mell into a thick

growth of scrub hemlock which was near at hand.

My bee-veil protected my face and neck nicely, but some of the sharp bayonets of this infuriated army pricked the skin on my wrists, and one went up my pants leg on a voyage of discovery.

I yelled with pain and fought them desperately.

I was lucky enough to get off with four or five stings, but these made my wrists swell badly.

When the bees at last left me, and I peeped out of the bushes to see how it fared with old Ben, I saw, to my great astonishment, that he was sitting on one end of the fallen log, with a swarm of bees about him, but apparently quite unconcerned.

“Run, Ben,” I cried, “you will be stung to death.”

“They won’t hurt me. I have handled the little critters before. I am better pro-

tected than you, for I have on a pair of gloves that protect my wrists. I meant to have told you to go farther back when the tree fell, but it got ahead of me.

"We'll put some mud on those stings of yours and it will soon cure them. That is the remedy all the wild creatures use. But we are well paid for our pains. There is a hundred pounds of honey in this tree if there is an ounce."

When the roaring of the angry swarm had partially died down, I went nearer to see the honey.

It was a most beautiful sight. Although the comb had been considerably broken in the fall, yet it still kept many of its fantastic shapes.

Running up and down in the middle of the cavity was a solid pillar of comb, eight or nine inches in diameter, and that was fastened to the inside of the cavity every foot or so, by smaller braces of comb, filled with delicious honey.

Ben said these braces were put in to steady the main column, and keep it from falling.

We took out two large milk pails full of the delicious sweet and left as much more in the tree.

The following day we came back and got the rest, but the swarm, which we also intended to capture, had disappeared.

“They didn’t want to trust themselves to our mercies any longer,” said Ben. “They will find another hollow tree, and before the frost has closed the late golden-rod and the purple asters, they will have sweet enough stored up, to carry them through the cold weather. If we had brought their house down about their heads a month or two later, they would probably have all perished.

“I always feel as mean as dirt when I take away the honey that the poor bee has gathered drop by drop, bringing some of it three miles perhaps.

“If the bee labored so hard, it seems as though she ought to have it. But man makes all earth’s creatures work for him, and sometimes he is not even grateful.”

**THE SPECKLED HEIFER'S
CALF**

CHAPTER IV

The Speckled Heifer's Calf

THE speckled heifer was my very own, and of course a wonderful cow. She had been mine ever since she was a frisky spotted calf, looking as much like a fawn as a bossy.

I had taught her to drink milk from a bucket and had tethered her out all the first summer in the backyard. In fact, she was a spoiled and petted calf, and that was probably why she hid her own first calf when it was born.

This was a great blow to me, as I had hoped that the new calf would mate one that I already had and make a pair of steers, but the ways of Providence are beyond finding out.

We knew well enough that the speckled

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heifer had a calf somewhere in the great pasture, but, where, was the question. The heifer's bag was large, and her udders were wet each morning when we found her quietly feeding, as though her thoughts were upon anything but calves.

I spent several days watching and spying upon her, but with no success. As long as I was in sight she would eat grass or lie in the shade and chew her cud, but as soon as I got interested in a bird's nest, or a berry patch she was gone, and I would see no more of her that day. We tried taking a dog into the pasture in hopes of frightening her into fleeing to her bossy, but the experiment was a failure.

The sight of the dog seemed to drive the young cow almost frantic and to fill her with blind, unreasonable rage. She charged the poor dog, who was innocent of any evil towards her, again and again, until at last the bewildered canine stuck

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his tail between his legs and ran out of the pasture. Then she turned upon Ben and me.

Ben took refuge in a thicket, so she left him, and came for me. At first I thought I was not afraid of the speckled heifer; was she not my own bossy and had I not petted her ever since the day she was born? I called "Bossy, Bossy," in my most persuasive tones, but she came at me like a mad creature, forcing me to shin up a small tree with the dexterity of a monkey.

When I had reached a safe limb I looked for Ben, and discovered him peeping out of the thicket, and laughing.

"Harry," he called, "that heifer has gone stark mad for the moment and you and I had better make ourselves scarce. She will be all right again when she has had time to cool off. Mother love is a queer instinct."

The most dangerous animal in the

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world is an enraged female who thinks her young are threatened. When the speckled heifer had gone away to feed in a different part of the pasture, Ben and I slunk away just as the poor dog had done, and left her to chew the cud of reflection.

The following morning when we visited the pasture a wonderful change had come over the heifer. She stood at the bars bellowing and moaning pitifully. Her eyes were large and full of pain, her muzzle was covered with foam, and her sides were wet with sweat. In addition to this, there were savage scratches upon her back and shoulders and she was trembling as though with great fear.

When she saw us coming she redoubled her lowing, and started off across the pasture at a brisk trot.

“Something is up,” said Ben. “She is eager enough to show us where the calf is

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now, but in my opinion it won't do any good, for we will find it dead."

My grief and astonishment at this announcement were too great for words, so I trotted along silently behind Ben, hoping against hope, that he would be mistaken for once.

There was no sham or deceit about the speckled heifer to-day and we had to go at a brisk trot to keep up with her. She occasionally looked back to see if we were following, and seemed rather afraid that we would turn back.

She led us straight to the deep woods and in and out, among the thickets until we came to a thick clump of spruces. These trees stood so close together that their spreading tops kept out the sunlight quite effectively and a kind of twilight or gloom always reigned beneath them.

There, in the deepest shadows, as

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though to screen so sad a sight from the bright light of day, lay the little bossy for which we had searched so long and diligently. He was a perfect beauty, as nature had designed him, with a sleek, glossy coat, generously flecked and dappled like his mother's, but, as we beheld him, he was a pitiful sight.

His throat was horribly torn as though by hungry fangs, his head and neck were badly lacerated and he was besmeared with his own bright blood, and covered with blow-flies. The ground about was trampled and bloodstained, the ferns and underbrush were broken and there was every evidence of a desperate struggle.

I was too grief-stricken to speak. Ben was carefully noticing all the signs, as was his Indian way. When he had examined the wounds upon the dead calf carefully, and noted all the hoofprints in the trampled forest carpet, he fell to examining a nearby tree trunk.

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"Seems to me this tree trunk looks mighty interesting, Harry," he exclaimed. "What do you think about it?"

"Looks just like all the rest of the tree trunks," I replied in disgust. It annoyed me that Ben should think of such trifling things as how tree trunks looked at a time like this.

"Come here, Harry," said he, "and let me show you that it does not look just like all the other tree trunks."

I followed Ben's finger carefully from point to point, as he showed me where the bark had been scratched and torn off. At each of these points was a deep scar in the bark, that showed the white wood beneath. Finally Ben picked two soft gray hairs from beneath a sliver of bark, and held them up for my inspection.

"Look like cat hairs," I suggested.

"Mightily," replied Ben. "They are cat hairs, and they came out of the coat of a wildcat."

"A wildcat," I exclaimed in astonishment, at the same time looking up into the branches overhead apprehensively; "where in the world did it come from?"

"Oh, up on the mountain," replied Ben. "There have been litters of bobcats raised on the mountain off and on for several years, but they don't often hunt so far from home. The kittens must be quite cats by this time, and so their mother has to hunt far and near to satisfy them.

"It happened last evening, probably, at about twilight. The great cats hunt in the morning and evening. Sometimes they hunt by moonlight, but rarely in broad daylight.

"Mrs. Bobcat probably came prowling through the pasture in search of a gray rabbit and with no thought of calf. She is rather dull colored this time of year, and is hardly noticeable among the browns of the ferns and the dried up weeds. A bobcat always sneaks along like a gray

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shadow. She probably came upon the calf in hiding when its mother was feeding and pounced upon it, without considering that there was a mother to reckon with. There is where it was lying. Here are the hoof prints where the poor calf plunged about, probably with the cat upon its back tearing at its throat. I presume about that time it did some tall bleating and Specky appeared on the scene.

“Then Mrs. Bobcat went up this tree. I have already shown you the clawprints. The cat had a rather close call, too, for here is a scar where the heifer's horn has ripped the bark off.

“This attack probably infuriated the cat and she revenged herself by dropping on the heifer's back. That is how she came to be so clawed. Then the heifer lost her head and lit out. The bobcat must have hopped off when she had ridden a few rods, and come back to finish the calf.

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The heifer must have run clear down to the bars."

I opened both my eyes and mouth wide with astonishment as Ben unfolded the story of this little tragedy. A moment before the whole thing had seemed an inscrutable mystery, and here it was before our eyes as plain as the page of a printed book.

"You piece things together just like a block puzzle," I said. "I never could have made it out at all, but it comes to you just like a story."

"It all comes with time, Harry," replied the old man. "Reading signs is a science, just like astronomy, and has to be acquired. We'll leave the calf just as he is, and to-morrow we will be around and have a wildcat hunt."

"How are you going to manage it, Ben?" I asked, for it seemed to me like rather dangerous business. To my boyish fancy the tops of all the trees in the

The Speckled Heifer's Calf 105

pasture were already swarming with bobcats, which might drop down upon our heads at any moment.

"Oh, I guess we will manage it all right," Ben replied. "I will borrow a fox hound and you can go along with a pail of salt. When the dog gets the cat good and tired by running her, you can creep up and put the salt on her tail. Then we can carry her home in a bag."

Had it not been for the twinkle in Ben's eye as he explained his plan, I should have thought the program decidedly alarming. Even as it was, I fairly lamed my neck looking up into the treetops as we journeyed home. I could see Ben watching me from the corner of his eye and trying not to smile.

The following morning, just when the pink and saffron east had begun to glow and blush, I was awakened by pebbles being tossed against my bed-room window.

"Come, come, bobcat hunter, get up!

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The trail will get cold if we wait too long," called a voice below.

When I joined Ben a few moments later on the back porch, I found to my great surprise that he was not armed, except with a stout club, while in his other hand he carried a small tin pail.

"Why, Ben, where is old Kentucky?" I asked, feeling almost afraid to start out on this hunting trip without Ben's trusty rifle.

"Oh, she is pretty heavy, and I thought I had better leave her at home," drawled my companion, "but I have brought along your pail of salt. You see I rely mostly on you and the salt."

A cold chill crept down my spine. Did Ben really intend to have me go after the cat with salt? If so, I would rather be excused.

I peeped into the pail and saw that it contained brimstone, instead of salt, and so was quite relieved.

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The dew was very heavy and the grass was full of cobwebs. Ben said it was a fine morning for "trailing."

We lost no time in getting to the woods, but, before letting the hound go, we made a complete circle of the spot where the dead calf lay, keeping the dog on the leash.

The hound at once discovered the trail and by the way he jumped about and whined to be let loose, we knew that the track was very fresh.

When we untied the cord from his collar, the hound went off at a brisk pace, while its long drawn owe-e-u-u-wowu-u wow-u-u floated pleasantly back to us on the fresh morning wind.

As soon as the hound was fairly off, we ran to a commanding position about a third of the way up the mountain.

For about five minutes the hound wound in and out through the woods, then started for the mountain at a lively clip. To my

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great astonishment the dog ran by within a few rods of us, and I hardly dared to breathe as the chase drew near. I fully expected to see a bobcat, about the size of a tiger, break into the open.

"Why didn't we see it go by, Ben?" I whispered.

"It went before we came up," replied Ben. "Look there!"

At the moment he spoke, the long-drawn notes of the fox hound changed to short sharp barks, interspersed with excited yelps.

I looked in the direction indicated and saw a large gray animal, with a short tail and a whiskery visage, spring lightly upon the trunk of a tree that had been partly blown down, but which still stood at an angle lodged against its fellows.

The cat scratched up the trunk for eight or ten feet and then, in a frenzy of rage that fairly made my hair stand on end, began tearing the bark from the tree, at the

The Speckled Heifer's Calf 109

same time uttering a series of the most bloodcurdling screeches and snarls. The bark came down in showers, the cat's claws flew so rapidly that I could scarcely see them, while the screeching seemed to my ears like the screaming of a panther.

"Let's go home, Ben," I whispered between the chattering of my teeth. "She might see us. You know we aren't armed."

Ben laughed. "A bobcat won't fight unless she is cornered," he said. "You can go home if you wish to, but you don't want to leave me to be eaten alive, do you?"

I made no reply, though I felt anything but comfortable. To tell the truth, at that moment, I wished that I was at home in the ten acre lot hoeing corn, or almost anywhere else than where I was.

Presently the cat jumped from the tree trunk and ran up the mountain side, the dog following in hot haste.

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Its long drawn owe-e-w-u had now changed to a quick bark varied by excited yelps.

In five minutes more the barking had changed to nothing but yelps and Ben cried, "Good, the cat has either treed or holed. Come on, Harry."

I was afraid to go and still more afraid to stay behind, so I followed Ben, fairly treading on his heels in my anxiety to keep as close to my companion as possible.

We found the hound barking and scratching away excitedly at a fair-sized hole in a great ledge.

Ben seemed much pleased at this discovery, and, for final evidence that the cat had holed, he picked a gray hair from the edge of the rock and held it up for my inspection.

"Looks just like the one we saw on the tree, Harry," he said. "Now you take the pail and scramble into the hole and feed the cat some brimstone, while I stay out-

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side and keep the male bobcat from coming in and disturbing you."

"Not much," I said. "I haven't lost any bobcat."

Ben brought a large flat stone and placed it so that it would cover the entrance to the den. Then he put the brimstone into the mouth of the den and set fire to it, covering the flat stone over with his coat, that none of the fumes might escape.

For a minute or two, all was silent inside, but finally we heard a coughing and scratching; then the cat made a sudden rush for the entrance of the den.

I was terribly afraid that the stone would be pushed aside, but Ben only gripped his club and grinned at my alarm.

"Guess I better let him out, Harry," he said at length. "It seems to be strangling him," and to my horror he raised the stone so as to make a small crack.

Ben had gone mad, but his folly should

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be on his own head. I was not going to be food for a bobcat.

Then Ben let go his hold on the stone and it fell flat in front of the hole leaving the entrance free. With a yell of terror, I started down the mountain side, not stopping even to choose my footing, feeling that to break my neck was better than to be clawed to ribbons.

Presently, I made a misstep and landed in a heap at the bottom of a little gully. When I picked myself up, I heard Ben calling to me. "Come back, Harry," he hallooed. "It's all over. I've killed the bobcat."

I clambered back but took care to reconnoiter at a safe distance.

It was just as Ben had said. The great gray cat lay dead at his feet. My courage came back and I joined him and the hound at the entrance of the den.

"How in the world did you kill it,

Ben?" I asked. "You didn't have any gun."

"I didn't need any," he replied. "It was so stupefied that it wouldn't have known its own grandmother. The brimstone did the business. I simply knocked her on the head when she came out."

It was a fine specimen of the bobcat, or bay lynx, as it should really be called. Its coat was long and silky, of a grayish tone, striped and flecked with light brown. There were several brown streaks along the back and some tawny patches upon the sides. The tail had several dark rings and was tipped with black. The animal's long, sharp, white claws, sent a shiver down my back as I felt them.

When we had carried the cat home, Ben brought out the spring scales and, tying a cord about the bobcat's hind legs, he hooked in the scales and swung the splendid specimen clear of the ground. My

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eyes opened wide as the indicator sprung down until it registered thirty-six pounds. After all, to have such a fine skin as this was some compensation for the loss of the speckled heifer's calf.

CAMPING WITH OLD BEN



CHAPTER V

Camping With Old Ben

WHEN old Ben told me one August day that we would go away into the great woods for a week's camping out, and that we would start within a day or two, my joy knew no bounds.

I rolled upon the ground and shouted, stood upon my head and turned hand-springs. In fact, my joy was so great that I could not find any kind of antic that quite expressed it.

This had long been a dream of delight which I had thought almost too good ever to come true, but here it was about to be realized. "Which would you rather live in, a tent or a shack?" asked Ben, when I had become sufficiently calmed to consider details.

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"A tent would be better in a rain storm, but a shack is mighty clean and pleasant, and it smells so woodsy that I like it myself."

"Wouldn't we come home, Ben," I asked, "if it rained very hard?" The idea of withstanding a soaking rain storm of a day or two had never occurred to me until that moment. To my notion, camping out was all sunshine, warmth and sweet air.

"You might, if you want to, but you don't think that I would come chasing home for a shower, do you? You would make a healthy guide, if you are afraid of getting your skin wet."

"Oh, I am not afraid," I replied. "I had never thought of stormy weather."

"Perhaps we had better take a tent and make a shack, too," Ben suggested, "then we will be fixed for almost any kind of weather."

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The next two days were busy ones for us both. We had to lay in a store of provisions and overhaul the tent, which was an old one that Ben had not used for several years.

I whittled an entire new lot of tent pegs and felt quite like an Indian making a wigwam.

The third day after the expedition had been proposed by Ben, we loaded our outfit into the express wagon, and father drove us to what was called the great woods. The latter part of the journey had to be made through pastures over an old wood road and I got out and opened the gates or took down the bars between the pastures.

We arrived upon the outskirts of this wilderness, as it seemed to me, in the afternoon and at once set to work on our camp.

When we had unloaded our camp sup-

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plies, and father and the old express wagon had disappeared between the tree trunks, Ben looked critically about us.

"This isn't just an ideal camping spot," he said, "but I guess it will have to do for to-night. We haven't much time to look about. We will just camp here to-night, and to-morrow we can look around a bit. I'll put up the tent, and you go and look for a spring.

"I usually find the spring first and then pitch the tent near it, but I haven't time to look for one to-night so we will trust to luck.

"See the top of those black ashes yonder, you look over there. It is low ground, and black ash always grows in a moist spot, so I presume you will find either a small brook or a spring somewhere near."

It was only a few rods away, almost within sight of our prospective camp, so I hurried off, glad that Ben had thought

me capable of doing an important part of getting our first camp ready.

The black ashes proved to be on moist land, as Ben had predicted, but there was no well defined waterway, although the ground was soft and swampy.

I circled about, quartering like a fox hound, as Ben had taught me to do when looking for anything in the woods, but no spring could I find. I was loath to give up and be beaten in this my first attempt in helping, but finally was obliged to turn back without having discovered water.

I had gone but a few rods from camp, or so it seemed to me, and was quite sure of the direction back to my starting point.

I hastened, for it was getting towards twilight, and long black shadows were already creeping through the woods. Somehow it seemed mighty lonesome away from Ben although I would not have admitted it for the world.

To my great astonishment I found that camp did not lie just beyond some spruces as I had thought, so I turned back to my starting point and tried another direction, but that seemed to lead me still deeper into the woods.

This would never do, I must be more careful, so I went back to a clump of birches that I had just started from, to try it over again, but to my dismay they were not the same birches, but a new clump.

How long and black the shadows were. How still it was; I must hurry. So I started on a run in a new direction which I felt sure would bring me to camp.

As soon as I began running, my alarm, which had not been great up to that point, increased tenfold, and I ran hither and thither, like a deer, taking almost no note of landmarks, as Ben had taught me to do, but trying to cover as many rods as possible in the shortest time. I scratched my

hands and face in the underbrush and twice went head over heels upon the ground, but that was nothing.

In about thirty seconds I was back again at the clump of birches, so I tried another direction, but came right back to the same place.

It was terrible; did all the paths in the woods lead right back to this spot? Then it dawned upon me, I was running about in a circle.

I had read of such cases in books. Of how men became lost in the woods and ran around and around in a circle until they dropped of fatigue. Suddenly the sweet green woods with its lengthening shadows seemed to stretch out in every direction for a million miles. I was the only living creature in all that vast solitude unless it was filled with bears, wolves, ghosts and hobgoblins. Such a wild terror as I have never known before or since seized me. My hair stood up, my teeth

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chattered, my heart thumped away at my ribs as though it would jump through between them; I seemed as small as a sand flea in the middle of the desert of Sahara. Never, never as long as the world stood, would I be able to get out of this hateful woods.

At last the silence and the terror of it grew so upon me, that I lifted up my voice and yelled like a savage. I did not give one shout and then listen to see if it was answered but bellowed at the top of my lungs, drawing my breath with great sobs between the deafening passages of my distress.

"Hello, that you, Harry?" cried a cheerful voice that was so near to me that I ceased my bellowing instantly.

Stifling my sobs as best I could and wiping the tears from my cheeks with the back of my hand, I rushed towards the spot from whence came the voice.

Ben was drawing down the corners of

his mouth and trying hard not to laugh. "Have you treed a painter, Harry," he asked, "or was it a pack of Apaches that I just heard?"

"You needn't laugh at me," I blubbered, "I have been lost. How did you find me so quick?"

"I find you, I find you, boy! Why I haven't been looking for you. I guess you found yourself."

"Well, how come you away off here when I left you making camp, miles away from here?" I asked, feeling sure that I had him where he would have to give in.

Ben very considerably stifled a laugh and sneezed instead. Then motioned to me to come to him.

"What do you call that?" he asked pointing to the tent which was already up, although it had been screened from me by some trees.

"That's the tent," I replied feeling that I was being made a fool of, "but you have

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moved it. This isn't the place where we were going to pitch it."

"The very same," replied Ben. "You've lost your compass, Harry. You have been clear around camp and come out on the opposite side from which you left, so everything looks different.

"I heard you coming—sounded like a moose, and I was just going to halloo to you when you let out that yell. Those lungs of yours can't be beaten.

"When you are in the woods you must notice peculiarities in the trees and that will keep you from getting lost. An old stump, a spreading spruce, an ironwood tree, which is not common, a hillock or a rock, all these things are the guideboards in the woods that tell you the way back to camp.

"But you needn't feel cut up about it, Harry. There isn't any danger that you will get so lost in this county, that I could not hear you screech. Now you may look

me up some dead sticks for firewood, if you can."

Ben soon had a bright fire going between three stones that he had arranged forming three sides of a square.

"It is always a good plan to place stones in that way, Harry," he said, "so your fire won't keep tumbling down as fast as it burns. If we were real savages, instead of make-believes, starting the fire would be quite a process, and it might take half an hour. We would have to use a flint and some tinder, and it would be quite a trick."

I opened a can of salmon and it was soon sending out a fine odor, as it sizzled in the frying pan.

"Seems as though I could eat it, frying pan and all," I said. Ben laughed. "That's the tonic of the woods," he said. "It beats any medicine that I ever heard of for a poor appetite."

When Ben had fried some potatoes, and

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made some coffee, our supper was ready.

We ate it upon a flat rock and I do not think that anything that I ever ate at home upon a fine table cloth tasted so good.

After supper Ben cut two small hemlocks, and dragged them near the tent, and we set to work to strip them of all their small branches and needles.

“There isn’t anything in the world that makes as soft and sweet a bed as hemlock needles,” explained Ben. “The odor is a sort of sleeping potion, too, it always does me good to sleep on either hemlock or pine needles.”

When we had a large pile of the sweet, springy hemlock plumes, we carried them into the tent, and Ben showed me how to cover the pile with the blanket, and then tuck the edges under so that when we laid upon it, our bed would not flatten out as much as it would otherwise do.

Our second blanket we put on top of the first one, and Ben called it, "the spread."

The bed now being ready, we went outside and piled a lot of wood upon the camp fire and sat down by it, to enjoy a real camp fire talk.

"Of course, we don't need the fire to-night to keep us warm," said Ben, "but it looks so cheerful that I love to watch it burn and see the pictures come and go. Besides it helps to keep off the mosquitoes.

"A bright fire is good to cook with, but a smudge keeps off mosquitoes. To make a smudge, put on some punk, or, if you cannot find that, a bunch of green grass."

I pulled a handful of grass and was astonished to see how quickly a dark wreath of smoke was curling up through the tree-tops.

"The Indians always used fires for

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signals," explained Ben, "and they could communicate several miles away by means of them. This was their telegraph.

"What I enjoy about camping out," continued Ben, "is the wonderful mysterious life all about us. The flowers, the trees, the grass, the birds, the squirrels and all the four-footed creatures. God made the trees to shelter man and to rustle their leaves above his head, and it is a pity that we have to cut down so many of them. Why, Harry, there is more wonder to me in an ant-hill, than there is in the whole city of New York. The Brooklyn bridge and the tall blocks, and the great churches are not nearly as hard for man to build, as it is for the ants to do some of the things that they do.

"There is music, too, in the woods. The glad trilling of birds, and the joyous chatter of squirrels. The long roll of the cock partridge, and the merry tattoo of the woodpecker. Then the wind and the

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waters are always talking and the leaves are telling secrets overhead.

"There is always a mystery, too, in the woods. Something to keep you guessing. Was that pitter-patter in the leaves a red squirrel, a chipmunk, or just a shy, sweet, little wood mouse? How quickly the ear learns to distinguish, the steady even trot of the fox, and the hop of the rabbit, the rustle of a twig that denotes a bird, and the bending of the bough that tells you where a squirrel has just sprung.

"The signs, the sights and the sounds of the woods are among earth's sweetest secrets.

"Sometimes I think that I would like to be the wood nymph and have charge of all these furred and feathered creatures myself."

"Who is the wood nymph, Ben?" I asked.

"Oh, just a beautiful young lady who lives in the woods, and looks out for all

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the wild things and loves and pities them," replied Ben. "Did I ever tell you how 'twas the squirrel got his brush, Harry?"

"No," I exclaimed all excitement, "please tell me."

Ben filled his pipe, and lighted it with a coal from our camp fire and then began.

"Well, it was this way. One morning the squirrel was sitting upon a limb, chattering away for dear life, he was having the finest time in the world. Nuts were thick as spatter on the tree and the sun was shining brightly, and the squirrel was so glad that he didn't know what to do about it, so he just frisked and chattered. By and by, along came the wood thrush. 'Hold on, Mr. Scatterbrains,' cried the wood thrush, 'I wonder if you know what a noise you are making? Why, if I had such a voice as you have got I would never let anyone hear me using it. It fairly sets my nerves on edge. Why don't you sing like this?' Wood Thrush swelled out his

breast, and poured forth such a sweet song, that the poor squirrel saw at once that his voice was very harsh, and discordant.

“‘There,’ said the wood thrush, ending up with a fine trill, ‘now I would keep quiet, if I were you.’

“Well, the wood thrush soon flew away, and the squirrel felt so ashamed that he didn’t even squeak again that morning.

“Pretty soon, along came Blue Jay and he says to Mr. Red Squirrel. ‘What a rusty old red coat you have got, Mr. Squirrel. If I was you I think I would visit the tailor and get a new suit, your old one is really quite dull. Why don’t you have a suit like mine?’ and Blue Jay flashed his bright blue uniform in the sunlight.

“Then Mr. Red Squirrel saw that he not only had no voice, but that his coat upon which he had prided himself, was quite dull compared with that of the blue jay.

“In those far off times Mr. Red Squir-

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rel's tail was not the fine brush that it is now, but a smooth tail like that of the rat. So he really had nothing to be proud of.

"Well, Mr. Red Squirrel felt so bad about it that he finally went to the wood nymph.

" 'Dear Wood Nymph,' he said, 'I am very sad. I have no fine voice like Wood Thrush, and I have no gay coat like Blue Jay, and they are all making fun of me.'

" 'I am sorry Red Squirrel,' said the wood nymph in such a sweet voice that Red Squirrel at once felt better. 'It is very impolite of them to put on airs about graces that I gave them. I shall have to speak to them about it. But you are really quite as pretty as they are in your way. Why, don't you see, Mr. Squirrel, you have four legs, and they haven't but two? You are much better off in that respect.'

" 'That is so,' replied Red Squirrel rather proudly, and he gave a great jump

just to show how nimble his legs were. 'If I only had a beautiful tail like a peacock I think I would be perfectly happy.'

" 'The peacock's tail would not do for you at all,' said the wood nymph, 'but I will make yours over and it shall be your flag that you can wave defiantly at Wood Thrush, and Blue Jay whenever they tell you you are not beautiful.'

"So Mr. Red Squirrel hopped upon the beautiful wood nymph's shoulder, and she covered his eyes with one hand, while with the other she worked upon his tail.

" 'How long will it take you?' asked the squirrel.

" 'See,' replied the wood nymph, and she uncovered his eyes and Mr. Red Squirrel saw that he had the most wonderful bushy tail in the woods, that is, for his size.

"Then how he frisked about and chattered, and all the time he kept his tail twitching and waving so all the wood

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folks might see how gay he had become. He was so delighted with his new tail that he did not even stop to thank the wood nymph, but ran away to show it to Wood Thrush, and to Blue Jay.

“When the poor chipmunk saw what the wood nymph had done for Red Squirrel, he was much dissatisfied with his own smooth tail, so he, too, went to the wood nymph.

“‘Dear wood nymph,’ cried chippy, ‘my tail is very homely, won’t you please fix it like Red Squirrel’s?’

“So the kind wood nymph covered chippy’s eyes with her hand while she made his tail more fluffy and beautiful.

“‘It isn’t nearly as large as Red Squirrel’s,’ said chippy when she had finished.

“‘Why, you are not half as large as Red Squirrel yourself,’ replied the wood nymph laughing. ‘I guess it is large enough for your size.’

“But Chippy was not satisfied, so the

wood nymph finally painted his sides with several bright stripes, and that is how he became little Striped Sides."

"There is another pretty good story," continued Ben. "It is about how the skunk got his scent. I presume people have often wondered.

"One day, years and years ago, a skunk sat down under a juniper bush to think, and he quite naturally got to thinking about himself.

" 'What a poor stupid old thing I am,' he said. 'I am the most defenseless of all the forest folks. I cannot run away from my enemies like the rabbit, because my legs are short. I cannot bite like the woodchuck because my teeth are not so sharp. I cannot go into my shell like the turtle when I am threatened because I have no shell. I have no nimble wits like the fox. If something is not done my kind will be exterminated.'

"When the kind wood nymph saw the

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skunk's sorrowful face, she was troubled, for it saddens her to see any of her creatures grieve.

"She pondered long and deeply upon the subject, and then a bright smile overspread her face. When the skunk saw the smile, he was glad because he knew that the good wood nymph had thought of something fine for him.

" 'Mr. Skunk,' said the wood nymph in her sweetest tones, 'I am most sorry that you were left so defenseless, and I have thought of a plan. I will give you this wonderful smelling bottle, and whenever any of your enemies trouble you, just take out the cork.'

"Mr. Skunk took the magic bottle, and hurried away, eager to try it upon some one of his enemies.

"He did not have to wait long, for soon Mr. Red Fox came creeping by.

" 'Ah, here is a snap,' he said. 'My breakfast already cooked. I do believe



M*R. Fox did not finish his remarks*

that the skunk is the stupidest, animal in—”

“But Mr. Fox did not finish his remarks for just at that point, when the fox was about to jump, Mr. Skunk took out the stopper from his magic bottle.

“Mr. Red Fox turned a double summersault in his haste to leave that part of the woods, and he ran away yelping, and pawing at his eyes and nose.

“To this very day Mr. Red Fox always takes off his hat when he meets a skunk, as do all the other animals in the woods.

“Camp fire is getting low, Harry, I guess we had better turn in.”

We scrambled into the tent, like two boys, and threw ourselves upon the luxuriant bed of hemlock. Ben drew the outside blanket over us and tucked it in and in fewer minutes than it takes to tell it, I myself was standing before the wood nymph asking that I might be equipped with wings like the eagle.

FOREST FOOTFALLS

CHAPTER VI

Forest Footfalls

WHAT glorious days those were when Ben and I wandered in the mysterious woods searching out its secrets, becoming each day better acquainted with the birds and squirrels, the rabbits and mice, and all the innumerable family of the wood folks.

Little by little I learned to see with the eyes of a woodsman.

To separate the rabbit from the brown brake in which he squatted, the bird from the leaves in which it sought to screen itself, the squirrel from the knot that he tried to impersonate.

"The only way to see things in the woods," said Ben one day as we sat on an old log in the leafy green depths, "is to

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sit still and let them come to you. We folks with all our cunning are so much more stupid than the wild creatures in the woods that they always see or hear us first, and that is why the forest often seems to be deserted when we pass through.

“Perhaps birds have been singing and chirping, and squirrels have been chattering a moment before, but as soon as the clumsy foot of man comes pounding through the woods, all becomes as quiet as though uninhabited.

“A moose, large and clumsy as he seems, can travel more quietly in the woods than the untrained man. One moment the great bull will be standing behind a tree looking out curiously at you as you go thrashing through the aisles of the forest; the next instant, without the slightest sound of a footfall or the snapping of a twig, he fades away like a gray shadow and disappears like a ghost.

“It would surprise you, Harry, to know how many eyes are watching as you go through the woods. Most of the wild creatures do not flee away in panic, but secrete themselves cunningly and watch to see what this strange creature, man, is doing.

“The squirrel flattens himself out on a branch, and a limb two inches in diameter will entirely hide him; or perhaps he may make believe he is a knot upon the tree, and he will do it so well that you will probably be deceived.

“The rabbit usually hides in plain sight, but you think him a stone or a continuation of the end of an old log.

“The owl passes for a bunch of last year’s leaves or a gnarl on the tree. The principal art in hiding in the woods is to keep perfectly still and nature has so fashioned the coats of the birds and the four-footed creatures that they blend with the friendly shadows.

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“Go into the woods and sit perfectly still for half an hour and see what a change will come.

“Perhaps your first caller is a little brown bird who will come fluttering down through the boughs to get a better look at you.

“Then the wood mouse will slip slyly out of his den at the root of a tree and peep curiously.

“Soon you may hear a pitter-patter in the leaves. That is a squirrel; it may be a weasel, but it is more likely to be a squirrel. If the noise is more like a strut than a pitter-patter, it is a partridge and it may be feeding, looking here and there in the ends of rotten logs and stumps for grubs.

“If the sounds are further apart and more uneven, it is probably a rabbit. The steady trot, trot, trot, of a fox is always easy to recognize.

“It is as easy to recognize these little

footfalls in the woods, once you have learned them, as it is to tell the step of your father or mother in your own home."

"Don't you ever get deceived, Ben?" I asked. For to me nearly all the sounds in the woods were merely noises, although I recognized most of the bird songs and their call notes.

"Oh, yes, even the best ear is deceived sometimes," replied Ben, "but you must learn in the woods to hear or see a little part of the truth and supply the rest."

"Then you will know that these gray and brown streaks that you occasionally see flitting across the path, or just gliding behind some bush are not fancies but real living creatures, all eyes, ears and noses and quivering with alertness. Then every time that a twig snaps, brake rustles, or a bough bends you will know what it means.

"It is little things and not large ones

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in the woods that tell the wonderful story of nature's secret. Anyone can follow a track in the new snow, but only the trained trailer can follow it upon bare ground.

"The things the trailer sees you would pass by as unimportant. It may be a broken twig, some moss brushed off a log, a bit of bark from a tree, but these little things tell which way the trail leads."

"Looks to me a good deal like finding a needle in a hay mow," I ventured.

Ben laughed. "It used to seem so to me," he said cheerily, "but you see I am an old man, and you are only a small boy. All things come to him who waits, and a boy can learn much by keeping his eyes and ears open."

That evening after supper we piled our camp fire high with dry limbs that I had gathered for the purpose, and old Ben told me camp fire tales until all thoughts

of sleep left me and I was as wide awake as an owl.

Finally, he turned in and I sat there in the cheerful fire-light with my back against an old log listening to the pleasant night sounds and thinking of what a wonderful place the forest was, now I was learning to love it.

The great pines, upon the bluff back of the camp, sighed mournfully and the night winds answered them in low soughing tones.

Far away in the woods a fox barked his sharp, short bark. The great horned owl sounded his hunting cry and then listened for the prey to betray its whereabouts. A little screech owl whistled shrilly and a tree frog took up the same strain. The tree frog's song was still trembling in my ears when I fell asleep beside the camp fire and dreamed a terrible dream.

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I was a hunter in the African jungles and was lying by my camp fire asleep when a huge lion began creeping slowly upon me, intent upon devouring me or carrying me off into the jungle alive.

I was powerless to move or cry out and the lion drew nearer and nearer.

The horror of the situation caused me to wake to what seemed to me quite as bad a plight as that in my dream.

I was not an African lion hunter, that was plain, but only a terribly scared small boy who had fallen asleep in the woods. The camp fire had gone out and there was nothing ominous in that, but there was another consideration and here was the difficulty.

A mighty animal, probably a bear, was standing guard over me. I could see the outline of the massive head against the sky, the glow of two large yellow eyes, and could feel the hot breath of the beast upon my face.

Then I remembered dozens of horrible stories that I had read, of how wild creatures stood above sleeping hunters until they awoke or moved, when they sprang upon them and tore them to bits.

My tongue grew parched and clove to the roof of my mouth. My heart beat so hard that I knew the bear must hear it, and a chill like ice water stole down my back.

Probably I lay like this for five seconds, then a stratagem came to me which terror helped me put into execution.

Our camp was on a side hill and the entrance of the tent was below me. With a sudden motion I rolled over and over towards the tent door, and at the same time I gave a yell that made the vocal attempts of the great horned owl seem like whispers.

Over and over I spun like a top until I struck fairly upon the bunk, bringing

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Ben to his feet as though steel springs had been under him.

"Land of Liberty, Harry, what is it, night-horse?" That was what Ben called nightmare.

"A bear in camp, a bear," I gasped with just breath enough left to give the information.

We could hear some large animal tumbling about our dishes, and sniffing hungrily.

"Don't sound to me exactly like a bear," said Ben in his ordinary tone of voice.

"Ben, Ben, keep still," I gasped, "we haven't any gun."

Ben chuckled. "I'm not afraid of bears," he said. "This is a good, kind bear, Harry."

"Come here, bear," he continued snapping his fingers and uttering a low whistle.

A great brute as large as a yearling calf

came bounding into the tent and with a yell of terror I dove into a corner behind Ben.

“Now, Harry, stop screeching and let me introduce you to this good, kind bear. His name is Ponto, and he wants to kiss you. What a long tail he has for a bear!”

I uncovered my eyes and beheld Ponto, a great Newfoundland dog belonging to one of our neighbors.

“You see you will have to study forest footfalls a little more, Harry,” chuckled Ben as he smoothed Ponto’s coat; “then you will be able to tell a mastodon from a field mouse when it comes into camp.”

IN THE HUNTER'S MOON

CHAPTER VII

In the Hunter's Moon

OF all the seasons of the year that make the heart of a boy glad, I know of none better than October, the time of the Hunter's Moon, the season of fulfillment.

When all the promises of Springtime have been redeemed. When all the treasures of nature are poured into the lap of the glad earth and man has but to eat drink and be merry.

Then the corn is stacked in the field, a thousand Indian wigwams with golden pumpkins gleaming in between. The barn is fragrant with the new hay. Granaries are full to overflowing with all the treasures of Ceres, while Pomona's gifts hang bright red, yellow, and green, in all the loaded orchards.

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Even better than these to the mind of the boy are the walnut and chestnut groves, with hair-raising climbs into the top of tall trees for the treasure of the forest.

The cranberry bog, too, is bright with berries, and here one may not only pick berries, but also watch the muskrats piling up their houses against the Winter cold, which will soon be upon them.

The muskrat is particularly fortunate, for he not only lives in this queer house, but also eats it, for it is partly built of the roots that he best likes.

On these wonderful Autumn nights, when the sky was so studded with stars that there seemed not room for one more, when the air was rich with the smell of the ripe corn, and the perfume of ripe fruit, when the melon patch alone was an Eden to the mind of a boy, old Ben and I used to take long night walks, and it was then

that we did about the only hunting that we ever permitted ourselves.

Old Ben's philosophy in regard to the wild life was that each creature, and even the bugs and insects, although many of them seemed worse than useless to us, had their use. That they were put here for some purpose, and that we spoiled the plan of nature when we attempted to exterminate any of them.

He greatly astonished me one day by saying that there were not twenty-five per cent. as many song and game birds as there had been twenty years before, and that it was costing the government and the farmer nearly a billion dollars a year in loss of crops, fighting insects that had multiplied so rapidly since the birds had been depleted and could not longer keep these pests down.

"Hunt vermin, Harry, if you must hunt," he would say, "and let the rest of God's creatures alone."

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One Autumn the raccoons became so plentiful and did so much damage upon my father's farm, that old Ben declared them vermin for the time being, and we had some famous hunts, although we got but one raccoon all the Autumn.

We did not so much mind if the raccoons did make holes in the sides of the pumpkins scooping out the seeds and eating them, or if they came into the garden and made sad work in the vegetables, or ate sweet apples. They had to live and there was enough for both us and them, but when they visited our hen coops and killed a dozen fine pullets in a single night, even old Ben's anger was aroused, and he and I declared war upon the raccoons.

Ben's old fox hound Bugler was a famous raccoon dog, and together with a dog borrowed from a neighbor, made up our pack.

We would keep the dogs, in the leash, and go with them to all the neighboring

cornfields. We would circle entirely around each field and would usually find a fresh raccoon track that the dogs were all eagerness to follow.

There were several reasons why we did not get any coons. Sometimes they climbed such large trees that we could not cut them down or climb them. Often they holed in the ledges near by, where we could not dig them out, while frequently the dogs would lose the scent after going a short distance, or Bugler would strike a fox track, and leave the raccoon for a fox, which he considered better worth while.

One hunt that we had I shall never forget. Thoughts of it even now make my hair rise on my head, for it was only old Ben's wonderful alertness, and presence of mind that saved me a terrible scratching from a bobcat.

On the particular night to which I refer we had a varied experience, and one

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that filled the evening with thrills enough to satisfy even the mind of a boy.

First, the dogs took a fresh trail at the edge of my father's cornfield, and went off at a brisk pace. They soon holed the coon in those same ledges that had given us so much trouble, and we had to try again.

After keeping the dogs upon a leash for an hour and not starting another raccoon we let them go, and they were presently barking briskly in a deep swamp.

Soon we heard some large animal coming rapidly towards us, and were all excitement.

"That is no coon, Harry," said Ben under his breath. "Keep your eyes open, boy, and you may see something that will be worth while."

Ben cocked his rifle, and stood listening and watching. I strained my eyes in the direction of the sound, but could make out nothing.

Presently there was a rush of feet which seemed to come immediately towards us, and before I had the faintest idea of what game was a-foot, a beautiful doe, with a little dappled fawn, stood panting at the edge of the bright rim of light cast by our lanterns.

For a full minute they stood gazing wide-eyed and spellbound at the strange brightness, just as they will at a jack.

The fawn crowded close to its dam, and gazed up at her with an inquiring look, but the doe kept her terror-wide eyes fixed upon the light of our lantern, as though her life depended upon holding it with her gaze.

It was a wonderful picture and one that I shall never forget.

The bright patch of light, like a picture frame, and the two beautiful heads at its center.

Then the dogs came out of the swamp into the open, with a great baying and the

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doe and fawn fled precipitately, going at such a breakneck pace that it would seem as though they must break their legs, for it was quite dark on this particular evening.

Ben explained after we had caught the dogs that a deer had a wonderful faculty for running in the dark, even through thick timber, and that he had never seen but one deer with a broken leg.

We took the dogs away for a mile in the opposite direction from that in which the deer had fled, before letting them go.

Once more they took to the deep swamp, and soon they were baying away again in an excited manner.

As the sounds came from one spot and the dogs did not seem to be moving, Ben said that something out of the ordinary was up. He said it did not sound like "Up a Tree," and he did not know what to make of it.

Five minutes of floundering about over

dead logs and stepping in deep holes which we could not avoid, and we came up with the dogs.

They were dancing about a queer looking object, very much excited, but seemed to be rather afraid of their game.

At the sight Ben rushed forward as though his life depended upon his speed, and began whipping the dogs back with a switch that he broke from a near by bush.

In the dim light I could not just make out what the queer game was, but Ben shouted, "It's a porcupine, Harry. We came just in time to save the dogs."

"Would he eat them?" I asked in my ignorance. Ben laughed. "Worse than that," he replied. "He would fill them full of quills."

Then I went up close and we examined the queer fellow to our hearts' content.

I had never seen a porcupine before,

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a hedgehog being the nearest approach that I had known to this wonderful wilderness freak.

The hedgehog is first cousin to the porcupine, but much smaller.

This specimen that Ben and I were examining would weigh twenty-five pounds and was covered with quills three or four inches long. Ben told me that they were barbed, so that if they once entered an object they could not easily be pulled out, but would travel until they came out at the other side.

He said that he knew of a dog that had had quills pass entirely through him. A terrible fate.

The porcupine lay flat down upon the ground to protect his belly, where there were not so many quills.

"Now watch, Harry," cried Ben, and he poked at the place where the tail should have been, for Mr. Porcupine did not seem to have any tail.

Quick as a flash the tail shot out, and two quills stuck in the end of the stick. "That is what would have happened to the dogs," explained Ben. "For all he looks so harmless this is one of the worst fellows in the woods for a dog to tackle."

We found a hollow log and poked Mr. Porcupine into it, and then partially plugged up the end. "That will keep him snug until the dogs forget about him," explained Ben; "we will let him out to-morrow."

This swamp seemed fated so we took the dogs away to a maple sugar bush, which was a fine place for raccoons.

They soon started what we thought a coon, and were almost immediately barking "Up a Tree."

Ben and I hurried to the spot, all excitement.

That evening while we had been hunting for our first raccoon track, Ben had been lecturing me upon the importance of

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always being upon the alert in the woods, and especially of the necessity for instant obedience.

All the wilderness babies have to obey instantly. Their lives depend upon it. So man when he goes into the woods must be alert, and it is always well for a boy to obey his elders when he is in the woods without stopping to ask questions.

One of the great dangers, especially when in a district where the timber has been partially cut off recently, is from limbs that lodge in the tops of trees when adjacent trees are felled.

These limbs will often swoop down without a minute's warning and strike a man dead. More lumber jacks are killed in this way than in any other.

I listened attentively while Ben talked, but did not imagine that we would so soon have a demonstration of the wisdom of my guide's remarks.

On hurrying to the spot where the dogs

had brought to bay our supposed raccoon we discovered that it was not in a very high tree, and our hopes rose high as we thought we would be sure of this coon.

Ben began circling about trying to locate the raccoon, at the same time throwing sticks and stones into the top of the tree.

Suddenly there was a sharp rustle in the branches, and then old Ben's voice rang out in a sharp command, "Jump, Harry, jump."

I had just been pondering his remarks about quick obedience in the woods, so without waiting to ask why, as I might otherwise have done, I sprang six feet ahead, turning to look over my shoulder as I jumped.

What I saw in mid-air above me made me follow up my first spring with two more, much longer and more hurried, for there just above my head was a large dark object, with two gleaming eyes, the

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fierceness of which froze the blood in my veins.

I also imagined that I could see extended claws, and the mouth of the creature wide open ready to take a piece out of the back of my neck.

Just as the animal struck the ground Ben's rifle (old Kentucky) cracked, and an enormous bay lynx stretched out dead almost at our very feet.

Then when it was all over, I turned white as a sheet, and my knees shook so that I could hardly stand.

"That was a pretty close call, Harry," cried Ben. "I didn't suppose that my lesson on instant obedience would be demonstrated so soon, but you can't ever tell in the woods. We must always be ready."

We tied the great cat to a pole and carried it home between us, and were well satisfied with that night's raccoon hunt.

But all the way home I kept looking



TURNING my head to look over my shoulder
as I jumped

over my shoulder, half expecting to see another lynx bearing down upon me from the upper air.

A WINTER WALK

CHAPTER VIII

A Winter Walk

ONE afternoon late in December Ben and I tied on our snowshoes and went for a Winter's walk.

Although it was only December, there had been several heavy snows, with some sharp freezes, so that the old earth had the appearance of midwinter.

It was fine snowshoeing, there being just crust enough to hold us up so that we glided along easily.

"It has always been a wonder to me," said Ben, as we shuffled along, "how the wild creatures can take such good care of themselves in the extreme cold.

"A tiny field mouse or a bit of woodpecker can keep warm and provide for

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their daily wants where you and I would freeze and starve.

"Where do you imagine the meadow mice are now, Harry?"

"I don't know," I replied. "I should think they would have a hard time of it."

"Not at all, not at all," replied Ben. "They are as snug as bugs in rugs in their endless winding tunnels under the grass roots. The deep snow that looks so cold only serves to keep them warm.

"A meadow mouse doesn't have to keep to four or five rooms in the winter, as you or I do. He has got a dozen pantries and a dozen dining-rooms in his tunnels underground, and sitting-room and bedroom with each. He can travel also if he has a mind to in his winding tunnels.

"So all he has got to do is to eat, sleep and be merry, while you and I have to saw and split the wood and do a dozen other chores."

“The field mouse and the wood mouse are just as snug, and they go abroad more even than their cousins of the meadows.

“You will often see their dainty tracks in the snow about the roots of a tree, or near some wall. It is such a lacework pattern that you will never mistake it.

“It is almost as much of a mystery how the fox survives when we remember that his principal article of diet, in the seasons when the ground is not covered with snow, is mice. He rarely catches any in the winter, although he occasionally digs down to the grass and tries his luck.

“Nearly all the other small game upon which he relies in the summer is now denuded up, and Mr. Fox has to sharpen his wits or go hungry.

“But he is a clever fellow and will get his dinner in some way, where more stupid animals would starve.

“I am afraid, even as it is, that he would

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often go hungry if it were not for the poor rabbit, who is food for both bird and beast, and probably the most widely hunted creature that runs on four legs.

“The hawk, the owl, the weasel, the wild cat, the lynx, the fisher, and last, but not least, the sly reynard, all dine on the poor rabbit, and if he did not multiply so rapidly, he would soon become extinct.

“Now, Harry, what do you make of the big bunch of leaves away up in the top of that tall maple at the edge of the woods?”

“It looks like a crow’s nest,” I replied, “but I guess it isn’t anything but just some leaves that have lodged in that crotch.”

“Mighty queer that so many should have lodged in just that way,” replied Ben. “I guess it is a squirrel’s hammock and that one and perhaps two sleek grayers

are tucked away in that swinging cradle so that every wind that blows will rock them in their sleep.

“Some of the grayers den up in hollow trees, while others who are more fanciful build themselves a veritable cradle in the treetop. They take short sticks and place them in a triangular shape where limbs fork out, and then begin filling in the middle of the triangle with leaves.

“Then they build on more sticks and fill up with more leaves until they have a bunch as large as a bushel basket. When this is done they dig a hole from the lower side into the middle of this nest. The hole is always on the lee side of the nest so that they will not get the wind. There they sleep, while the wind rocks their cradle.

“In the same manner a porcupine will crawl up to the very top of a slight tree and let the wind rock him to sleep. He

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hasn't any fear either that he will forget himself and let go when he is napping. About the only thing his feet have ever been taught is to hold on.

"Here we are at the rabbit swamp. Now we will have to take off our snowshoes and wallow."

It was not so much fun treading our way through the laurel as it had been scuffling along on the top of the snow. Occasionally, I would catch my toe under a root or in a tangle of underbrush, and down I would go. Once in a while, I would step in some deep hole that the snow had covered up and would go in almost to my armpits; then Ben would pull me out, and we would both have a good laugh at my expense.

"Here is the rabbit's Broadway," said Ben, winding about through the laurel. "It's crooked enough to be Washington Street, but it is just a rabbit's main street through his village. Here on each side

are the avenues and the other side streets and leading off from them are the paths leading up to Mr. Rabbit's front door. Perhaps Mr. Rabbit's house is a nest under three feet of snow beneath a bunch of laurel roots, or maybe it is an old burrow; in either case he keeps as mum about it as he can. He doesn't keep his card tacked up to tell the other wild creatures where he lives."

"Why not?" I asked. "I should think he would want his friends to know where he lived."

"So he would if he had any, other than rabbit friends," replied Ben, "but his acquaintances outside the rabbit family are mostly enemies. If it is near a stream the mink will come and try to find what number Mr. Rabbit's house is.

"The weasel will also try to catch him asleep and suck his blood, while half a dozen others will try to catch him outside his house.

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"See that old yellow birch stub at the edge of the swamp?" asked Ben.

I saw it and remarked that it did not look very interesting.

"There you are wrong, boy. Dead trees are always more interesting than live ones when you are out looking for the wild folk. One old dead maple stump standing in the middle of the cow pasture is worth a whole grove of ordinary maples.

"Now, that old birch stump was the home of a family of raccoons last year, and I wouldn't be surprised if they were sleeping there now. You see, Harry, the raccoon is the little brother of the bear. He walks like a bear, he acts like a bear, and his face looks very much like a bear's. He likes many of the things that a bear eats; in fact, he is a real little bear, although he has a long ringed tail and is considered only a raccoon."

We went over to the birch stump and Ben pointed out fresh scratches that some

animal had made by climbing the tree recently.

“There is another point where he resembles the bear; he always backs down out of his front door as Bruin does. Ten to one, Harry, there are three or four fat coons in there asleep at this very moment.”

“There is one thing that I don’t understand, Ben,” I said, as we again put on our snowshoes and tramped on through the open hard wood.

“When I go into the woods alone there don’t seem to be so very many things to see, although I see more than I used to, but when I go with you every old stump contains something.”

Ben chuckled. “Does seem as though I had the street and number for all the wild folk down in my head, doesn’t it? Well, I haven’t at all. I just have to look for things like other people. A great many of the things that I show you I have

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spent days and weeks looking for. The secrets of the woods don't come easy, and that is why they are worth trying to discover.

"Did you ever stop to think where all the woodpeckers are keeping themselves in the winter? They don't migrate, that is, not many of them. The golden woodpecker, or flicker, does, but we still have the hairy, the downy, the red-crest, and the yellow-bellied sap-sucker. You will see them all on warm days.

"In the autumn these woodpeckers pick out winter quarters in the trees, and that is why you so often hear pounding in the fall. They make the winter nest larger and more commodious than the spring one but Mr. and Mrs. Woodpecker each have a nest, usually in different trees. In fact, I can't see that the pairing woodpeckers have very much to do with one another, once their young are reared.

"The yellow-bellied sap-sucker enjoys

the winter, especially the latter part of it, more than all the other woodpeckers put together, for it is his special time of harvest.

“As soon as sap will run, Mr. Yellow-Belly picks out a maple that he knows contains sweet sap, and goes up and down the trunk drilling small holes through the bark and into the wood. These holes are slanted down so that when the sap flows they will fill. By the time Mr. Yellow-Belly has drilled his fiftieth hole, the first is full of sap, and all the rogue has to do now is to travel up and down the trunk of the tree drinking out of his sap wells. He will sometimes spend nearly the whole of a warm March day drinking sap.

“Now we are coming to some queer looking country. It is the edge of Great Bear Swamp, but we are not going to penetrate it.”

It was a wild-looking, desolate piece of land, scantily wooded with small willows,

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birches, both white and yellow, and dotted here and there with a thick clump of spruces. The land was evidently rather moist and was altogether as uninteresting a spot as I had ever seen.

"I don't see what we came here for, Ben," I said, in a rather disgusted tone. "We can't see much here, unless it is an occasional rabbit track. It is about as lonesome a place as ever I saw."

"It is a lonesome spot," replied Ben, indulging my humor, "but those are just the places that the wild creatures like. They are not so fond of man's society as you might imagine.

"But I guess you will see other than rabbit tracks here. Tracks are just what I came here to show you."

Ben was right, as usual. In a few moments we came upon the greatest jumble of tracks that I have ever seen. They ran in every direction, but most of them kept to well-beaten paths.

"What in the world is this, Ben?" I cried, all excitement. "It doesn't look like anything I have ever seen. Seems as though a lot of sheep had been playing fox and geese."

"That is a pretty fair guess, Harry," said Ben. "They do look a little like sheep or calf tracks but that is not what it is. It is a deer yard."

"A deer yard!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "I don't see any fence around it."

Ben laughed. "This is a yard without a fence," he said. "You see, when the deep snow comes the deer is in a bad fix. He isn't built with his small cutting hoof for traveling in the snow. So he remedies the difficulty by making himself winter quarters.

"The deer always plan their yard so that it shall include plenty of birch, maple and willow browse, and so that they can get to a spring or brook.

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"Of course, if the water fails they eat snow, but they much prefer water."

"Ben," I cried, all excitement, "let's run them up into one corner of the yard where we can see them."

My companion laughed. "I guess you would find that quite an undertaking. This yard extends nearly around Bear Swamp, and it probably contains a dozen or fifteen deer. The yard is now doubtless several miles in extent, but it will be much smaller as the winter advances.

"The deer will find it too hard work to keep it all broken out, after the deep snows come, so they will give up a large part of it and narrow down to a hundred acres.

"I found the deer browsing not far from here the other day and perhaps we may see them if we have luck.

"Deer are very wary. Their scent is of the keenest, and their hearing is about

as good. The wind is in our favor, however, and that is worth a good deal."

Spite of all we could do, our snowshoes made quite a noise crunching upon the crust, but, as Ben said, the wind was in our favor, and that would also carry the noise as well as our scent away from the deer.

We crept cautiously forward for about forty rods. My nerves were strung to the highest pitch as I had seldom seen a deer.

Finally we came out on the brow of a slight hill which was quite thickly covered with scrub spruces.

Here we crept along from tree to tree, nicely screened by the dark green plumes.

Ben was the first to reach the brow of the hill and peer down into the valley beyond.

When he had done so he turned to me and, putting his finger on his lips as a sign

to keep very quiet, he lifted his other hand and wiggled his forefinger.

I knew the sign and was overjoyed. Ben had told me that to all tribes of the American Indians and to trappers and hunters, the world over, the wiggling of the index finger meant, "deer near at hand," as it is supposed to imitate the wiggling of the deer's tail when feeding.

I crept forward to Ben's side and peered in the direction that he indicated. The sight that met my eyes was one of wild picturesqueness and beauty that I shall never forget.

Beneath us was a warm, sheltered valley several acres in extent thickly dotted with small birches and here and there a clump of spruces. The rays of the setting sun fell aslant through the birches, causing their trunks to shine like silver, in strong contrast to the dark green of the spruces. The long shadows from the

evergreens fell across the valley like somber bars.

The snow sparkled and glistened and twigs that were snow-laden glittered like diamonds. The sun stood on the distant hilltop, gilding it with crimson and golden streaks.

There, in this wonderful setting of valley and hilltop, of light and shadow, were five feeding deer.

A tall, stately buck, was holding down a young birch while he browsed contentedly.

Two does were nibbling at some branches already broken down, while two fawns, who by this time had nearly lost their dappled markings, were standing close to the doe's flanks, as though for warmth and protection.

I hardly dared to breath lest by some magic the picture should fade away and be lost. I had barely taken in all the de-

tails of this wonderful scene when there was a strong puff of wind at our backs.

"Wind has shifted, Harry," whispered Ben. "Now watch them."

The whisper had barely died upon his lips when the buck threw up his head, snorted and stamped as though half beligerent and half terrified. Then there was another strong puff of wind and he stamped and snorted again, this time giving a short whistle, which sounded like blowing in a bottle.

At this signal the two feeding does sprang to his side, closely followed by the fawns, and the five deer stood in a close bunch wide-eyed and fearful. Their heads held high in the air, and their nostrils distended, their every sense strained to catch the slightest sound or scent.

Again the wind blew strong at our backs, and this time there was no mistaking the taint. With a snort of terror the buck wheeled and led the wild procession



H*E stamped and snorted again, this time giving
a short whistle*

at a breakneck pace across the valley and over the distant hilltop.

In fewer seconds than it takes to tell it, the gloom had swallowed them and the magic of the few fleeting moments was broken.

How suddenly the scene changed. Almost in a twinkling the long purple shadows turned to black, the sun disappeared from the distant hilltops, and only a blood red spot showed where the horizon had been warm and glowing a minute before.

In a second the thermometer seemed to have fallen a dozen degrees and the wind whistled dismally in the leafless treetops.

I shivered and turned up my coat collar. "Let's go home, Ben," I said. "There isn't any more fun for us in the woods to-day."

Without a word Ben turned and led the way and the rhythmic, mournful creak of our snowshoes made a fitting accompaniment to my thoughts.

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How cold, how cheerless, how desolate, the old world, that had seemed so bright and cheerful a few moments before, had grown. The warmth, the life, the joy was all gone out of it. How relentless and cold was the biting wind and frost, and how unmindful of all the wild creatures that in some miraculous way must feed themselves and keep warm until spring came.

"Harry," said Ben, as we came out into the road just above the barn, "I'll bet I can show you something in your own barn that you don't know is there."

"I'll bet you can't," I replied. "You may know the woods, Ben, but there isn't a crack or corner in the old barn that I don't know."

"Let's see," replied Ben.

We went to the barn door and Ben began a high-keyed, tremulous whistle, as mournful as a dirge.

To my great surprise it was answered in the same key from somewhere upon the big beams. Again Ben whistled and again the answer. Then there was a sudden flapping of wings and a bird about the size of a quail flapped down almost into our faces, hovered for a moment before us as though to inspect us and then flapped back into the dark.

It was a chunky brown bird, with a catlike head and a very hooked beak, but I had never seen it in the barn before.

"It's a little barn owl," said Ben. "I discovered him whistling here when I came by this afternoon, and I imagined that he had taken up winter quarters in the barn."

"You can almost always make one of those little screechers fly down at you by imitating his whistle. It seems to anger him to hear any one else whistling his own particular tune."

"Good-night, Harry. We will try and

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stalk the deer again some day, but you'll never see a prettier picture than we saw to-day, if you tramp the woods until you are as old as I am."

**CAMP FIRE LEGENDS OF THE
WOOD FOLKS**

CHAPTER IX

Camp Fire Legends of the Wood Folks

PROBABLY the most delightful of all the camp fires beside which old Ben told stories, while I listened with wide open eyes, was that of the sugar bush on a March night.

It really was not a camp fire at all, but the wonderful blaze in the great arch, above which the sap danced and steamed in the four-barrel pan.

Any boy who has not boiled sap on a March night with old Ben or some other good companion does not know what he has missed.

When there has been a great flow of sap and all the storage hogsheads in camp are full to overflowing, then it is necessary to boil night and day, to make room for

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the next run, and here it is that the boy who is not afraid of the dark, or the howling of the boisterous wind in the treetops, gets a whole lot of fun.

I was always glad for these extra flows of sap in our camp, for although it made back-breaking work, I knew that each evening I should see Ben's lantern come swinging down the road, and a moment later I should hear him shouting for me in the yard.

There is so much mystery about a lantern out of doors at night, and the shadows are so fearful that the whole gives just the right mixture of adventure to delight the heart of a boy.

Arrived at the camp Ben would refill the sap pan from the mighty storage hogsheads, fill the arch with snapping pine and spruce logs, and then spread blankets before the cheerful blaze, and we were ready for the Winter camp fire stories. Of

course Ben had to fill his pipe and puff away solemnly for a few moments before we were really off.

“Did I ever tell you how it was that the honey bee got its sting?” he asked one night.

“No,” I replied, “please tell me.” Ben settled back against a log in a comfortable position, pulled steadily at his pipe for a few seconds and then began.

“Well, it was this way. Years and years ago, when the world was sort of new, as you might say, the bees and the wasps didn’t have any stingers. There are honey bees now in the tropics that don’t have any, but in those days none of them had stingers. Well, there was a swarm of bees that lived in an old hollow rock maple. They were strong, swift flyers, and very industrious. They had lived in the old maple for several years, and for ten feet up and down, the hollow tree was

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filled with wonderful honey. It was a very large swarm, probably sixty thousand bees.

“Well, the tree that they lived in was standing at a slant. It had been partly blown over, and had lodged against other trees. The hole where the bees entered the tree was on the under side, so the rain didn’t beat in, and it was shaded in summer; altogether it was a fine home for the bees.

“The tree had been struck by lightning some time before they found it, and the bark had all peeled off. The rains and the winds had polished the wood until it was as smooth as finished ebony.

“One day a bee who was smarter than all her fellows had an idea. She had seen an otter sliding down a slippery clay bank, having the finest kind of a time, so it occurred to her that perhaps bees could do something similar. She probably never would have tried it, though, if she hadn’t

noticed what a fine slide could be had upon the bowl of the old maple that was so hard and smooth. So she buzzed up to the top of the smooth place and pulled her feet up under her, and folded her wings. Then she pushed off.

“Down she went in a splendid coast, and when she reached the bottom, she just spread her wings and soared off into the air, flying back to the starting place. It was just like a boy with a new toy. The more she slid the better she liked it. Finally other bees noticed what she was doing and they tried it. More and more bees came to try the new sport until at last there were hundreds sliding down the smoother side of the old maple. Finally, the queen bee noticed that they were not coming in with honey as they should be and she came to a crack in the tree and peeped out to see what was the matter.

“The queen at once put an end to the

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sport for that day by sending them all off for honey, but the sport got so popular that the queen had to make a rule that the bees should not slide down hill, until they had made so many trips to the flowers for honey. After that, the bees would hurry about their work so that they could get a chance to slide.

“Finally, one day a bee discovered another partly fallen tree in the woods and stopped gathering honey to slide upon it. But this tree was not smooth like the first, and before the bee knew what had happened, she had stuck a sharp splinter in her tail. This made it impossible for her to slide any more and it pained her. All of which she thought was punishment for not gathering honey when she ought and leaving the play until later.

“When she got home the rest of the bees all made sport of her with the splinter in her tail, until at last in sheer desperation she gave one of them a severe thrust with

the tail, which was now doubly sharp. The afflicted bee soon discovered that the new tail was a great weapon of defense, and none of the bees dared to tease her after that.

“But her weapon was not perfect until she had dipped it in poison, which she got from a poison plant.

“One day, soon after the bee had poisoned her tail, a meddlesome boy came poking about the tree. He soon discovered the hole where the bees entered, and began throwing stones at it.

“‘I will teach him a lesson,’ said the bee with the poison tail. ‘Now you just keep your eyes on that boy and see the fun.’

“Zip, went the bee like a bullet, and she struck the boy fairly on the end of the nose, driving her poison splinter deep into the flesh.

“The boy gave a howl that you could have heard for a quarter of a mile and

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started for home as though all the bears that came after the bad boys who sauced Elisha had been after him. But pretty soon his nose began to swell, and how it did smart and ache! When he got home to his mother, it was twice its normal size, and he was a comical sight. But the bee who had stung him had been so injured by having the splinter pulled from her tail that she died. That is the penalty that they pay for stinging to this day. The honey bee who stings you always dies in the act.

“When the other bees saw the boy jump and clap his hands over his nose, and heard the terrible yell that he gave, they were so tickled that they all vowed then and there that they would fix their tails just like the bee who had stung the boy. So the following day nearly the whole swarm went to the rough tree, of which the bee with a stinger had told them, and slid down it until each had a splinter in her

tail. Then all went to the poison plant and poisoned their splinters, and the whole hive were as well armed as the first bee had been.

"After that, men and animals became so afraid of the bees that they left them very much alone, and they were happier and more powerful than they had been before.

"When these bees with the poison tails came to hatch little new bees, it was discovered that the new bees had inherited the poison tail, which greatly delighted the queen and all the swarm.

"The bees with the poison tail who lived in the old hollow maple were so much better able to take care of themselves that all the old kind soon died out, until to-day all the bees in these parts have the stinger, as bears and boys and men can testify."

"That's a fine story, Ben," I said at the conclusion of the tale. "Can't you think of another?"

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Ben refilled his pipe and pulled away at it thoughtfully for a few moments, then said:

“Don’t think I ever told you how it was that the snake changes his suit every year. Perhaps that would interest you.

“Well, when the snake went into the Garden of Eden and tempted Eve there isn’t any account of his going on his belly. I can’t just say what his manner of traveling was. Perhaps he walked on the end of his tail, but if he did, he was a pretty good balancer.

“When God saw what the snake had done, how he had tempted Eve, got her to eat of the tree of knowledge, and broke up the whole plan of Eden, God said to the snake, ‘Henceforth you shall go upon your belly and be hated and bruised by men.’”

“So the snake got down on his belly and wriggled out of Eden, feeling that he

had sorter 'cooked his goose,' as you might say.

"At first he didn't mind it so much, for he could go creeping about in the grass very still and scare people, especially Eve and her daughters, making them scream and run. This was great fun for the snake and he would nearly split with laughter each time.

"But he soon found that there were great disadvantages in having to crawl on one's belly. In the first place, he could not go fast; in the second place, he could not see off and know when his enemies were coming; but, worst of all, it wore out his clothes.

"Why, that snake hadn't been going on his belly for three months before his pants were out at the knees, and he had scraped off all his vest buttons, while his coat was in tatters and so ragged that he could hardly keep it on.

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“This greatly injured the snake’s vanity, for he had a fine mottled suit of which he had been very proud before his fall.

“Finally his clothes got to looking so bad that he hardly dared to show himself, not even to scare Eve and her daughters, which had been his chief delight. Instead, he slunk about in dark corners and lost his appetite for frogs.

“Finally he got so blue about it that he decided to go and tell the Wood Nymph his troubles and see if anything could be done for his case.

“‘Dear Wood Nymph, kind friend of all living creatures,’ he began, ‘I am in great trouble. Ever since the day that I got those silly bipeds to eat the apple, I have had to go on my belly and my suit is getting so threadbare that I cannot appear in company any more. Besides, it no longer protects my under skin, which is sensitive, and is already quite sore with

scraping along the ground. If something cannot be done for me, I shall soon be entirely worn out.'

"When the Wood Nymph saw the snake's sorrow, although he was an ugly, wriggling, hissing thing, her heart was touched, for she knew that everything that God has made is of use and has its place.

" 'Mr. Snake,' she said, 'I am grieved for you. It was a sorry joke that you played in the Garden, and we cannot see when it will ever end, but I know your nature and your weakness, and will not judge you too harshly. You will have to go on your belly for the rest of your days as God has commanded; there is no help for that; but this much I will do for you. Each year when your old suit is worn out, I will give you a new one. When the old suit is entirely worn out, if you will wriggle and twist and writhe, you will find that it will come off, and under it there will be a fine new suit. But the style and

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color of the suit will always be the same, so that people may know you and keep out of your way.'

"When the snake heard this, he was as glad as a boy with a new kite, and at once went off into the grass to try and discover if the Wood Nymph had spoken the truth, for, being a great liar himself, he was suspicious of other people. So the snake wriggled, and writhed and twisted until his skin came off, and there under it, just as the Wood Nymph had said, was a new suit.

"Then the snake lay in the sun to let his new suit dry and harden, and when it was dried, he went about his business a happier snake than he had been for many a week.

"Speaking of how the snake sheds his skin," continued Ben, "reminds me of how Red Buck loses his antlers each spring. No matter how proudly he has been stepping about a few hours before, suddenly

his glory falls, and he is left as hornless as a doe.

“Then in three or four weeks, some bunches appear where the horns were, and these bunches are the new horns just beginning to grow. The horns are composed of lime which comes from the deer’s blood. Right at the base of the horns is a large artery which constantly feeds the new growth with blood, and this blood gradually deposits the hard substance that makes horn.

“While the buck is getting his new horns, he has troubles enough of his own, and so does not make any for others of the wood folks.

“The new horns are covered with a soft substance which is called velvet, and you will often see where the buck has rubbed it off against a tree. At this time of year, the new horns are sensitive and have to be continually rubbed. This is also to harden them, and get them in shape so

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that the red buck can fight his enemies, which are usually other bucks.

“It is very strange that the deer family should grow such splendid horns only to drop them in the late winter. The antlers of the Alaskan moose sometimes weigh ninety or a hundred pounds, and are six feet across.

“According to one of my camp fire legends, Harry, Red Buck didn’t use to drop his horns each year, but they were taken away from him as a punishment, just to keep him from being too high and mighty.

“In those old days, when he kept his horns for the entire year, he got to be so high stepping, and so combative that there was no peace for any one. He would even charge the rabbits and foxes, or anything that came his way. Often the spirit of combat was so strong within him that he would butt his own mate about, and he finally got so that he occa-

sionally killed his own fawn, especially if the fawn happened to be a buck.

“At last he got so bad that all the wood folks, including Red Buck’s mate, went to the Wood Nymph and made complaint against him. Mrs. Red Buck was loath to do this, but she really could not stand having her fawns killed.

“When the good Wood Nymph heard all this, and especially how Red Buck had killed his offspring, she looked very grieved, and her heart was full of trouble. She was kind and gentle herself, and she wished all the wood folks to be the same. Of course some of them had to kill others for food, and this was expected, but to kill one’s own relations in this way was too much.

“‘Red Buck shall be punished,’ said the Wood Nymph when she had heard all the complaints. ‘I have made him too beautiful, and have given him too large and too strong a set of antlers, but I can-

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not take them away from him entirely, for that will leave him defenseless. He must still have some weapon with which to fight the battle of life.'

"It was a very vexing question, and for a long time the Wood Nymph did not know what to do, but she finally decided to take down Red Buck's pride by taking away his horns for a part of the year, leaving him hornless only for that portion of the year when he needs them the least.

"So every year, a few weeks before the new fawns come, the proud buck loses his horns. Then his pride leaves him, and he goes away into the deep woods and nurses his new horns until they are quite well grown, and it is not until he has polished and rubbed them for several months that they are ready for the battle."

"That is a good story, Ben," I said when he had finished, "but I guess it is a make-believe."

"You ask the buck if losing his horns is

a make-believe, and I think he will tell you quite different."

"You don't know how it was that the partridge learned to drum, Ben?" I asked. I felt quite sure that if Ben didn't know, he would think up some ingenious way for accounting for it.

My companion refilled his pipe and pulled thoughtfully at it for several minutes before making reply. "Nothing polishes up my memory like a full pipe," he said at last.

"I didn't seem to remember just how it was at first, but I guess I have recollected. You see I am such an old man that I have forgotten a great many things that I used to know, and that was one of them. It was this way:

"Once there was a cock partridge who was not so beautiful as his fellows, and he had a hard time getting a mate. You know girls and women think a pile of fine feathers, and so do the lady birds.

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“This cock was strong and smart and all right in every way, only his feathers were rusty, and this made him feel awkward and out of place. You know how a boy feels when company comes and he has got on his old clothes with holes in the knees and elbows.

“Well, this cock didn’t have anything but just his old every-day rusty suit, so he didn’t feel like strutting up and down, and wooing the lady partridges as the other cocks did. And the lady partridges wouldn’t have anything to do with him.

“One day the poor cock was standing on an old log in a deep thicket, wishing that the hawk or the owl would happen along and carry him off, he was that cut up about it, when in a sudden fit of despair he raised both his wings and beat upon his breast. To his great surprise the thump of his wings against his breast made a loud noise that almost frightened him. But the sound that he had made

interested him, so presently he raised his wings and struck again.

“He soon discovered that by swelling out his feathers and by striking very hard and fast with his wings he could make a noise that fairly made the woods ring.

“When the rabbits and the squirrels first heard this racket in the deep woods that had been so quiet and peaceful a moment before, they were greatly frightened and fled away in terror, but finally one rabbit who was braver than the rest came back to investigate.

“The thing that the rabbit saw fairly took its breath away, for there, standing on the middle of the log, was Mr. Rusty Coat, as they called him. He was bristled up to his greatest size, and his wings were beating upon his breast so rapidly that the eye could not follow them. The cock looked as large as a bushel basket.

“When the rabbit saw what was going on in the thicket, it hurried away and told

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a female partridge who was scratching for beechnuts in a neighboring thicket. So the lady partridge went to see.

“She was so delighted with the performance and with the enormous size of the cock when he was drumming that she went right up to him and began making love to him when he had finished, although she had refused him several times before that spring.

“But by this time the cock was getting mighty vain of his accomplishment, so that when the lady partridge asked him to marry her, he said ‘not much.’ He was too busy drumming to think of marriage.

“They say a woman can’t keep a secret. No more can a lady partridge. So when the poor female saw that it was no use trying to get the cock, she told her sister partridges of the wonderful drummer on the old log in the witch-hazel thicket. So other female partridges came to hear the wonderful drummer, and he

soon had all the lady partridges in the woods about his drumming log watching and listening.

“No matter how saucy or hateful they had been to him when he was only Mr. Rusty Feathers, all were ready to praise and admire him now.

“Well, it ended just as it always does, Harry. They were so persistent that he finally had to marry one of them to get rid of the rest, so he picked out the most beautiful and the largest of all his admirers, and they were married by the Woodchuck, who was then Justice of the Peace, and I presume they lived happy for ever afterwards.

“You see this partridge’s drumming had turned out such a success that all the other partridges soon learned it, and they have kept it up to this very day.”

“Is that all, Ben?” I asked, my eyes riveted upon this wonderful magician of the camp fire.

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"Surely, Harry," replied my companion, jumping up briskly, "you don't want all the good things in one night. Besides it is time for our midnight lunch."

Then we would open the basket that my mother had packed for us and such an array of good things would be piled upon the blanket that I speedily forgot to tease for more camp fire stories.

When we had finished bread and butter, with eggs boiled in the hot sap, and eaten pie and doughnuts, we would set rosy baldwin apples sputtering before the dancing blaze, and chestnuts roasting in the coals. I would shell the popcorn, and soon it would be popping away like a Lilliputian army.

With these good things so tempting to the palate of a country boy we rounded out our midnight meal.

Outside the winds would be howling and shrieking in the treetops, while the

great branches thrashed their arms and groaned.

Perhaps in some lull there would come the mellow, mournful call of the great Horned Owl. I knew from Ben's teachings that the small horned owls were already hatched in the hollow top of some tree in the black ash swamp.

Or maybe the lull between gusts from nature's mighty bellows would be punctuated with the sharp bark of a fox.

Some night prowler in search of a partridge or a field mouse.

If the night was very cold occasionally the crust upon the snow would snap with a report like the crack of a rifle.

How well I knew all these night sounds, and what they meant, thanks to my kind old Woodsman Friend.

From listening to the outdoor sounds I would fall to studying the queer shapes that came and went in the firelight, or in

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the great clouds of steam that danced over the sap pan. Hobgoblins and ghosts without end.

I never could make out whether it was the howling of the wind and the snapping of the fire, or the bubbling of the sap, or all three that made me so sleepy.

When Ben had made everything snug for the night, and had spread down a couple of warm buffalo robes that we kept at camp for the purpose, a cozier bed could hardly be imagined. So to the music of the howling wind, and snapping fire and bubbling sap, we fell asleep before our Winter camp fire.





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